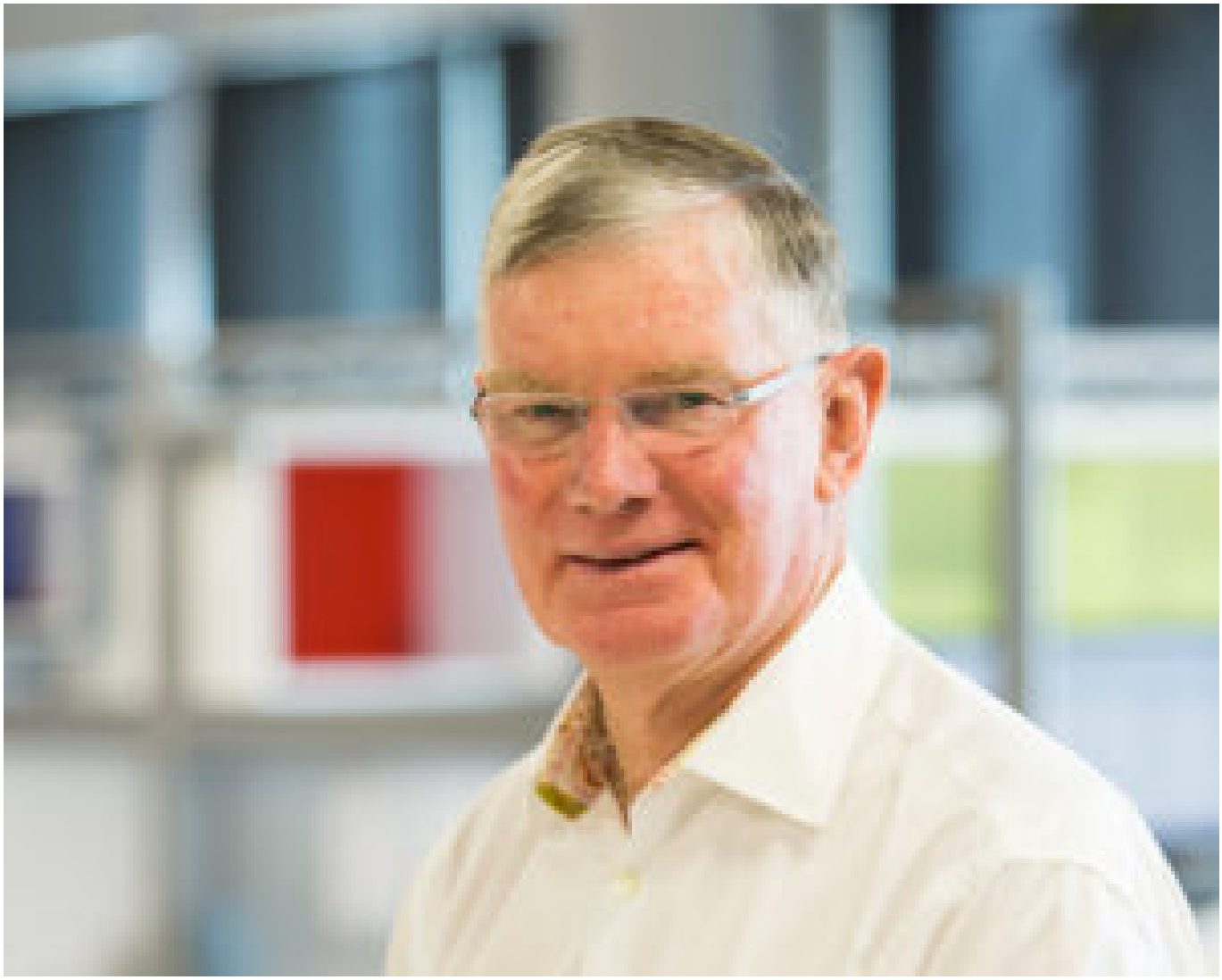

Michael Cooney MNZM

Posted on: September 11, 2024

14 June 1944 – 13 August 2024

Michael was a key figure at our firm for many years, and his legacy lives on in the values of the firm today.

After graduating from Auckland University and being admitted to the Bar in 1966, Michael moved home to Tauranga to join the family firm in 1970 alongside his father, uncle and brother Paul. He became a Partner three years' later. Property and contract law became his areas of expertise and he was often the trusted advisor to generations of families. He was respected by the legal community both locally and nationally as a lawyer of high standing.

Michael retired in 2019 and since his retirement he has remained in regular contact with the firm while also engaging in an active retirement; playing golf, spending time with family and travelling. He was regularly seen summiting the Mount and out cycling.

Partner, Rebecca Graham said of Michael "Working for many of Michael's clients now, it is clear that Michael commanded respect of clients and the legal community alike. He was always considered in his thoughts and the advice he gave. Because of this he had a huge loyal client base and was a trusted advisor to many. Michael always had a genuine interest in people and the community.

I first met Michael in the late 80s at the Tauranga Lawn Tennis Club where he was helping out with coaching. More recently, when I returned from working as a lawyer overseas, Michael encouraged me towards a legal career in Tauranga. He was keen to support the next generations coming through the firm and I feel very lucky to have his support and mentorship over this time."

While Michael played an immense leadership role within the firm for many decades, it is his work in the community which has undoubtedly had the greatest impact.

He served in many high-profile roles including 13 years as chairman of TECT where he oversaw the distribution of millions of dollars to fund community projects including sponsorship of the Trustpower TECT Rescue Helicopter and Tauranga Coastguard's rescue vessel.

For 30 years he presided over thousands of inquests as Tauranga's Coroner and was a founding member of the Life Education Trust in the Western Bay of Plenty in 1987, for which he was later awarded life membership.

However, he counted his role in helping to establish Tauranga's Aquinas College among his most satisfying contributions. "The opportunity to work with young people, and advance their careers, is a wonderful thing to take part in," he said at the time. He went on to serve as a Board of Trustees member at Aquinas and Tauranga's St Mary's Catholic School, and acted as solicitor to the Bishop for the Catholic Diocese of Hamilton.

Other notable achievements include serving as a Director of Trustpower for 12 years and Chairman of Equality Bay of Plenty – a charitable trust offering support for people with disabilities.

The keen sportsman also managed to squeeze in many years of coaching junior netball and tennis.

In recognition of Michael's immense service to the community, he was made a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit in 2013 and was also awarded a Paul Harris Fellowship by Rotary International in 2010.

These are some of the public roles in the community, but many of his contributions remain unsung as he was a man who did not draw attention to his many contributions to the community.

Michael was farewelled at a requiem mass held at St Mary Immaculate Church on Friday 16 August. The mass was celebrated by the Bishop of Hamilton, Most Rev. Richard Laurenson. Aquinas College's choir led the singing and there was a guard of honour and haka performed by senior Aquinas College students. Michael is survived by his wife Sandra, his daughters Sarah, Jane, Rebecca, Margaret and Charlotte and ten grandchildren. Our thoughts and prayers are with them.