

Allen Needham & Co 100 Year Celebration

SPEECH BY MAYOR HUGH VERCOE

Good evening,

Can I start by acknowledging this great occasion where we all come together to celebrate a unique event, 100 years of service by our local lawyers, Allen Needham & Co.

To Greg and Rod can I say, on behalf of all your guests here tonight thank you for including us in these special celebrations.

100 years is an awfully long time and looking around here tonight I can see very few people who would have any great understanding of what Morrinsville was like back in those early days. But on 1 January 1907 a young Solicitor, Stephen Allen, set up his legal practice in a small weatherboard building at 52 Canada Street.

At that time the Morrinsville population was recorded as being 383 people. 213 male and 170 female.

Canada Street was to be the future town's main street. We had the railway station at the south end of Canada Street and the Phoenix Hotel had been built in Canada Street on land opposite the new law practice. The hotel had burnt down a few years earlier, but there were expectations that it would be rebuilt on the same site.

In 1907 Morrinsville was not even a town. To be gazetted as such required a minimum of 50 houses. We didn't even have a bank in the village, and BNZ only established their first branch two years later in 1909.

So into a very small community Stephen Allen set up his legal practice right on the same site that Allen Needham & Co sits today.

Stephen was later joined by Arthur Needham followed by his son John Needham and now his grandson, Rod Needham.

Both Stephen Allen and Arthur Needham did far more for this community than simply provide legal services.

Stephen Allen was the first Chairman of the Morrinsville Town Board when it was gazetted in 1908. History records two different dates for the first meeting of the Morrinsville Town Board. One has it on 20 February 1908 and the other records the meeting on 22 February. This could of course have been simply a rather long meeting!

Stephen Allen, later Sir Stephen, joined the Territorial Army and enlisted into 6 Hauraki Regiment where he was promoted to the rank of Major. He was also elected unopposed as Mayor of Morrinsville in 1927.

Arthur Needham also moulded the early days of Morrinsville. He was President and life member of the Morrinsville Golf Club, Secretary of the Morrinsville Rugby Union and charter member and first President of the Morrinsville Rotary Club.

Can I also acknowledge the presence here tonight of Howard Sanford, a past partner of Allen Needham & Co. When I first shifted to Morrinsville in 1971, Howard assisted me to set up in business, beyond simple legal advice, and he played a large part in my own early business career.

To the current partners, Rod Needham and Greg McDonnell, can I acknowledge the very high standards of legal service that you have both continued for the practice. As my own office is opposite 52 Canada Street, I have regularly observed the late nights and long hours put in by both of you, especially leading up to 1 June each year. Some of us have however noticed that on some occasions Greg's salacious limousine together with Rod's 20cc motor scooter, both parked outside your office, while the office itself is enclosed in darkness. The lights of the neighbouring premises however were bright and inviting.

Tonight on behalf of the Morrinsville community can I say congratulations and thank you to all the partners and staff of Allen Needham & Co and as we celebrate 100 years of proud service, can I invite you all to charge your glasses, be upstanding and join me in drinking a toast to the next 100 years of Allen Needham & Co.

Hugh Vercoe
Mayor
Matamata-Piako District

31 March 2007