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OPOTIKI NEWS

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Red-weed pickers in demand

DIANE MCCARTHY

A COMPANY making pharmaceutical grade agar in Opotiki from seaweed washed up on beaches has recently employed 15 new staff members and hopes to double in size over the next year.

New Zealand Manuka Group chief executive Karl Gradon said that with 24 people employed at the Opotiki plant the company was now the biggest privately-held employer in Opotiki and it was reaching out to the East Coast community for help collecting more raw materials.

With a global shortage of high-quality agar – a seaweed-based gelling agent – the New Zealand Manuka Group has invested heavily in scientific resources, pharmaceutical grade facilities and modern production systems, positioning itself as world-class processor and innovator of agar products.

Originally an Awakeri-based honey and manuka oil processing company, in 2011 it purchased the old Coast Biologicals factory in Opotiki.

"It's all pretty exciting what's going on here," said Kath Coopey, technical adviser at NZ Manuka.

"Our Opotiki plant has undergone a complete revamp and is now producing high-grade pharmaceutical agar."

The group also opened a large plant processing seaweed in Masterton earlier this year.

Mr Gradon said while the Wairarapa plant used a mechanised process to collect and process the Pterocladia seaweed the agar was extracted from, this was because it was in a very remote area.

"In an area like the East Coast, with a large portion of the population living right by the beach, it made more sense to have them harvest it by hand and sell it to us."

He said the factory was prepared to pay about \$3 per kilogram for the dried product,

depending on factors such as the condition and quality of the product and whether it was delivered or needed collecting.

Found washed up on rocks and beaches along the east coast of New Zealand, the distinctive red Pterocladia seaweed is the raw material that, when processed and dried, forms agar. With worldwide demand far exceeding supply, the

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Our Opotiki plant has undergone a complete revamp and is now producing high-grade pharmaceutical agar.

KATH COOPEY

Building symbolises opening hearts



>HAMILTON Diocese Catholic Bishop Stephen Lowe offered a prayer and blessing before Trinity Chapman, 5, cut the ribbon to open the new million-dollar school building at St Joseph's School in Kelly Street.

Prior to arriving in Opotiki for the opening, the Bishop said he had seen a

picture of the school shield on the internet and its motto – E noho i te roto i te pono me te aroha – translated means "live in faith and love".

He told those gathered for the opening the motto was what the building was all about.

He said the striking archway at the entrance, where

he held a prayer, pointed to heaven, and the building's width symbolised children needing to open their hearts to everyone.

"Every time you go into your school that is what I want you to remember," he told them.

Photo Ross McCullough OB1648-2

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