

The Shepherdess Muster

A weekend of connection, learning and fun

by Kim Parkinson

There was something for everyone at the Shepherdess Muster held at Motu, an hour out of Gisborne, as more than 300 mostly rural women got off-farm to enjoy the huge variety of activities and entertainment on offer.

Stand-up comedy, burlesque dancers and frank discussions about often taboo subjects like menopause, sex and relationships were all on the menu at the inaugural Shepherdess Muster.

The first-of-its kind festival focused on connecting rural women for a weekend of relaxation, learning and fun.

Festival director Kristy McGregor was thrilled to finally be at Motu after it was postponed last February due to Cyclone Gabrielle hitting the region the same week.

“It has gone extremely well and been very

special. The feedback is overwhelmingly positive with most people saying it had exceeded their expectations,” Kristy said.

Comedian Michele A’Court got the weekend started on a high note with plenty of laughs at the op shop frocks-themed evening with band Shabang playing to a packed dance floor.

For the early risers, there was a morning farm walk, yoga or dance fitness on offer on Saturday, followed by keynote speakers Pania Te Paiho (of Wahine Toa Hunting) and sex and relationship therapist Jo Robertson.

This was followed by a variety of concurrent workshops including an introduction to stand-up comedy with A’Court and a burlesque dance lesson from Wellington’s Studio L’amour.

On Saturday night, there was a dinner catered by Flying Trestles with a bold and blooms dress theme.

With stunning floral arrangements by Kate Briant of The Rural Florist, the large marquee was full of colour and laughter as the audience enjoyed a burlesque show and live band.

Other workshops over the weekend included those with a business and cyclone recovery focus, including a business and entrepreneurship panel led by Rabobank’s Emma Higgins on Sunday morning.

There were also health and wellness workshops, beauty services, market stalls and an artsbreak area.

Kelly Spencer created a colourful mural featuring one of her trademark goddesses which was left as a gift for the students at Motu School, and painter Lindy McLachlan created community canvases, artworks participants were invited to paint themselves on to.

Committee member Sandra Mattreus said the weekend had taken years of planning but it

was all worthwhile to see the happy faces, and experience the buzz, the laughter and smiles of the women.

“It’s so rewarding to see everyone having fun and learning new things.”

The Shepherdess Muster was supported by local groups, Trust Tairāwhiti, Lottery Bay of Plenty/Gisborne Community grants, and national organisations from across the rural sector including The Agricultural and Marketing Research and Development Trust Rabobank, the Ministry for Primary Industries, Beef + Lamb NZ and the Rural Support Trust, Lotto and The Evergreen Foundation.

Pictures by Michelle Porter

MC Jemma Brackebush (left) hosts a Q&A with guest speaker Sarah Connor on the subject of menopause.



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