



Prime Minister Helen Clark (centre) with Janet Copsey, University Librarian (left) and Professor Raewyn Dalziel, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic).

Prime Minister opens 'stunning' building

Electronic snipping of a red "ribbon" projected onto a plasma screen officially opened the Kate Edger Information Commons in a fashion befitting its function.

The honours were performed by the Prime Minister who clicked a mouse to operate a pair of animated "scissors". The ribbon promptly fell away, revealing arresting images of Kate Edger and the Information Commons itself.

It was "truly a stunning building" Helen Clark told the ceremony on August 29. The University Library was regarded as one of the best in the southern hemisphere and the Information Commons "takes that to a whole new level". Bringing together study spaces and computer technology, it provided an important place for students to foster e-learning and other information skills.

Earlier Helen Clark commended the recent surge of new building activity on the City Campus with construction of the Information Commons to the fore.

The 120 guests at the early evening opening included architects, consultants, contractors, sculptors and artists, Property Services, Library and ITSS staff and others associated with the project. Also present were descendants of Kate Edger (see facing page).

The formalities began with Bernard Makaore of Ngati Whatua sounding a conch to call the Prime Minister, the official party and other guests into the building. The University Kuia, Dr Merimeri Penfold, led the karanga supported by Pounamu Performing Arts group. The group provided entertainment for the guests when the formalities were over.

Up on level 2 Dr Takutai Wikiriwhi, kaumatua for Ngati Whatua, formally

welcomed in mihi the guests. Hone Sadler, a senior lecturer in the Maori Studies Department, responded.

The Chancellor, John Graham, said this day had been long awaited by students and staff. Thanking them for their patience as they operated around the building site he said all could agree the wait for this "widely-encompassing, superb addition" to the University had been worth it. "One only has to wander through the complex at any time of the day or evening to know that the facility has exceeded all our expectations."

The Vice-Chancellor, Dr John Hood, praised the leadership of Janet Copsey and her impressive fellow librarians. "Their innovative provision of electronic materials and technologies, and their management of the extensive general and special collections mean we have one of the most advanced libraries in the southern hemisphere."

He said the Information Commons was a unique facility providing spaces for up to 1200 students to access the electronic databases of the world. It was "a most striking addition to the University: for its student utility, for its visual attraction, and for the related service amenities".

Together the Kate Edger and the adjacent Student Commons created a new, student-centred heart for the City Campus, said Dr Hood. A striking building deserved a striking association for its name and this had been provided by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor

(Academic), Professor Raewyn Dalziel, an historian and scholar of the women's movements in New Zealand. "She it was who advocated the idea of naming the Information Commons after Kate Edger" (see facing page). Thanking the Prime Minister, the Librarian Janet Copsey noted it was "barely four years since we first started talking about building an Information Commons. It has been an amazing journey since that time."

The term Information Commons had originated in North America and usually referred to facilities, situated within a Library building, that provided access to electronic learning and information resources for students. "This building is the first major instance, that we have been able to find, of a facility separate from a library."

The Kate Edger Information Commons significantly improved access to the University's extensive electronic library resources, said Ms Copsey, as well as providing quality space for "high-demand" course materials, both print and audio-visual.

"In addition the 500 plus computers provide access for students to the University's e-learning platform, the Internet, webmail and to a full suite of Office-type productivity tools as well as a range of other specialist software applications. Electronic file storage is also available for students."

The Library and other co-located learning support departments, such as the Student Learning Centre and the English Language



Kelvin Morunga of Pounamu Performing Arts Group.



Students watch from an upper floor of the Information Commons as guests arrive.



The 17 descendants of Kate Edger who attended the official opening of the Kate Edger Information Commons. From left to right: Melissa Tetzlaff, Nathan Tetzlaff, Valerie Tjoelker, Joshua Evans, David Evans, Amanda Evans, Ngaire Evans, Rachelle Evans, Neil Evans, Kath Evans. David Evans, Jill Smith, Rebecca Latter, Caitlin Smith, Stephanie Cotton. Don Evans, (in profile at right) Emeritus Professor Don Smith).

Name highlights women's achievements

► Self-Access Centre, were providing quality training courses and advice in areas such as information skills, IT literacy, learning techniques, and improving English language skills.

"We have literally thousands of students using the complex in one way or another every day – using the workstations, problem-solving, with the Information Commons consultants, studying in groups or on their own, in both formal and informal settings, photocopying recommended readings, using a colour printer, using the banking facilities, booking travel back home or simply drinking coffee with friends in a place that feels good."

Many had wondered whether or not the facility was too big, whether it would be fully used and whether the concept would work, said Ms Copsey. "It was with immense pleasure on day one to find that within four hours of opening, just after Easter, with not one advertisement, the facility was full."

It has continued to be "very well utilised" during the 113 hours a week it was open. "Hester Mountfield, the Information Commons Manager, and her team have done a superb job in making this facility work so brilliantly." ■

Among notable guests at the official opening of the Kate Edger Information Commons were 14 of Kate Edger's descendants.

The three generations of descendants included two grandchildren, six great grandchildren and six great great grandchildren of Kate Edger. Spouses of three Kate Edger descendants brought the number to 17. Among them were several alumni of The University of Auckland, including Jill Smith, grand daughter of Kate Edger (and wife of Emeritus Professor Don Smith from the English Department), who graduated with a BA and their daughter Caitlin, who completed an MA with first class honours in Political Studies.

David John Evans, great grandson of Kate Edger, graduated in Commerce and later completed a masters in taxation while his two brothers Paul and Neil also graduated from Auckland: Paul with a BA and Neil with an LLB and an MCom. Neil's graduation in Law came just 100 years after his great grandmother was conferred with her degree. A current student in Law and Arts, Nathan Tetzlaff, is Kate Edger's great great grandson.

Kate Milligan Edger was born in 1857 and graduated with a BA in Mathematics in 1877, after studying at Auckland College and Grammar School, the forerunner of Auckland University College. She was the first woman to gain a degree in New Zealand and the first woman in the British Empire to earn a BA.

To illustrate the magnificence of Kate Edger's feat, given the prevailing attitudes of the time, Vice-Chancellor, Dr John Hood, quoted at the opening from a sermon preached by J.W. Burgon at New College, Oxford, in 1884.

"We have lived to witness the proposed revokal of the law of Nature, which is also the law of God concerning Woman — so far as Women's Education is concerned. A new and hitherto unheard of experiment it seems is to be tried in this place: nothing less than the education of young Women *like* young Men and *with* young Men. Has the University seriously considered the inevitable consequences of this wild project? Will none of you have the generosity or the candour to tell [Woman] what a very disagreeable creature, in Man's account, she will inevitably become? If she is to compete successfully with Men for "honours" you must needs put the classic writers of antiquity into her hands — in other words, must introduce her to the obscenities of Greek and Roman literature. Can you seriously intend it? Is it then a part of your programme to defile that lovely spirit with the filth of old-world civilisation, and to acquaint maidens in their flower with a hundred abominable things which Women of any age (and Men too, if that were possible) would rather a thousand times be without?"

Dr Hood said that by naming this building after Kate Edger, the University community had given prominence to the educational achievements of women in New Zealand. ■



An image of Kate Edger can be seen to the right of Vice-Chancellor Dr John Hood as he addresses guests at the opening.