

NAENAE'S OWN Billy GRAHAM

NAMED NZ'S LOCAL HERO TOO

Brush and paint-tin in hand and rubbing spots of paint from his face, Billy Graham bustles into his Naenae Boxing Academy after his daily early morning inspection of the Naenae Shopping Centre.



Actions speak louder than words: Making a real difference in his Naenae community is Billy Graham, Local Heroes award winner in the New Zealander of the Year 2011.

“Those kids have been at it again... you just get one lot sorted and another lot move in to deface the place,” he says, his voice tinged with a mix of disappointment and sadness. “But at least if it’s cleaned off straightaway the Centre looks better for everyone.”

It’s just this “go out and do it and don’t moan and wait for someone else to do something about it” attitude that impressed the Judges in this year’s KiwiBank New Zealander of the Year Awards. They gave Naenae’s Billy Graham the 2011 Local Heroes Award for the way his self-financed fitness academy is turning around the lives of at-risk youth and also for his support of community programmes to remove graffiti and grow local talent in music and the performing arts.

In the Award’s words, “Billy is making a real difference to New Zealand and New Zealanders.”

Now in its sixth year, the former



Australasian boxing champion sold his family home to start up his boxing and fitness academy in the former Salvation Army hall in the heart of hometown Naenae. He wanted to help today’s troubled youth in the same way as his own boxing mentor, the late legendary Dick Dunn, turned Billy’s own life around.

“Nothing bar nothing could stop me getting to Dick Dunn’s gym every week and now I see young men with that same hunger wanting to get to my Academy,” he says.

Billy attended Naenae College as a lad but it was at the ‘school of hard knocks’ on the streets he learnt most of his lessons in life, so when he meets today’s so called ‘at risk’ young people he knows instinctively how they are feeling – and what can be done to encourage them.

He draws on Dick Dunn’s teachings of discipline, life skills and the art of boxing to give these boys a chance to make something of themselves.

The boys are all given a Passport to Success which teaches them about responsibility, compassion, consideration, kindness, duty, obedience, honesty and truthfulness. If they can recite the entire passport, word for word, they get free tuition. That’s about 300 words

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