



## Official Release

# **‘Horsepower’ Event Helps Rescue Helicopter Buy New Rapid Response Vehicle**

**For immediate release: Tuesday May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2026**

Horsepower, community and a stable of large and loyal supporters has got the Winter Olympics over the line in their quest to raise enough money to purchase a new Rapid Response Vehicle (RRV) for the rescue helicopter.

Driving force behind the grassroots equestrian event, Claire Wilson is ‘tickled pink’ to have pulled off the fundraising feat proudly handing over a cheque with her team of supporters yesterday at the hangar for \$102,000. (To be split two thirds with the Hawke’s Bay Rescue Helicopter Trust and one third with the Olympic Friends Groups: Dannevirke Hunt, Flemington School, Central Hawke’s Bay Pony Club and Connect Youth and Community).

“Having our sticker on the chopper was a huge achievement and we all get a great buzz out of seeing that but we were hungry for more, so when the opportunity came up to replace the heli’s RRV we jumped at it. I’m just so proud that we managed to pull it off!”

The \$68,000 cheque takes the total raised by the Winter Olympics for the regions’ rescue helicopter service to over \$170,000 since 2023 – firmly anointing the grassroots event among the lifesaving service’s top four financial supporters.

“To be ranking alongside big corporate giants is crazy and kind of inspiring that a little person with what started as a small idea can achieve as much as them. We were pretty

worried this year about the flow on of rising fuel prices but we've found we are inundated every year with amazing sponsors from all over New Zealand keen to get behind us."

Hawke's Bay Rescue Helicopter Trust Chief Executive, Andy Quayle says the purchase of the service's new Rapid Response Vehicle has already helped save local lives.

"Only last week our crew were tasked to a critically unwell paediatric patient in a remote area west of Waipukurau. Due to the heavy fog, we were unable to fly and had to respond by road (an hour away) in the new response car. Having a suitable response vehicle has made an immense impact on our ability to safely and effectively respond to these jobs.

"We remain incredibly grateful of the community support from the Winter Olympics team and their generosity. Their contribution will continue to help save lives for many years to come."

Raising \$535,655 over 15 years for local community groups and charities leaves fundraising powerhouse Claire Wilson feeling humbled and a little lost for words.

"It's crazy to think what's been achieved. This was not ever my intention to create something like this but it's grown a life of its own and got bigger it's now an absolute beast! I'm very proud to see that horse people are leading the way and can show other sports what can be done with a committed workforce, collective passion, grit and determination."

Long time Winter Olympics sponsor and supporter Janeane Strawbridge gets emotional reflecting on how far they've come.

"We get better and bigger each time and now we've become a well-oiled machine. I'm on the Trust for Winter Olympics and have been involved from the beginning when it was just 40 riders attending a tiny practice day. The 'feel-good' factor of the chopper and the monumental fundraising that goes on is just one component; it's also the way that it brings the community and the kids together too, I get quite teary because there are so many wins for everybody."

Fellow Winter Olympics Friend Amanda Godinet has seen first-hand how valuable the rescue helicopter service is.

"I work with the volunteer Fire Brigade down our way and sometimes we attend accidents alongside the chopper and they're absolutely incredible. As a rural person and a keen horsewoman I am truly grateful for their service, I know I speak for others but we couldn't pursue our sport without them."

With a record 200 plus riders this year Claire Wilson says the event is probably at its capacity.

"The two hundred rider mark seems to have us bulging at the seams; unless we flatten a few hills on the farm that'll be our limit, but there's no limit to our sponsors' appetite."

“It just shows one little idea, if enough people jump on board, look at the magic that can come out of it. Now we’ve purchased a vehicle that saves lives, that blows me away.”

***The Lowe Corporation Rescue Helicopter Service conducts around 400 lifesaving missions every year – made possible through essential Government funding combined with the generous support of local communities who provide grants, sponsorship and donations to sustain operations and assist in purchasing key equipment.***

**ENDS.**

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