

**Leigh Alexander Auton**  
**NZPI<sup>®</sup> Distinguished Service Award**  
**November 2009**

Well known in the profession, the recipient of NZPI's Distinguished Service Award has been a planner for many years starting his career in 1975 as a planning graduate at Waitemata City Council. Our recipient more than satisfies both criteria for this award having made a significant contribution over many years to the image and practice of planning and major contributions in the field of planning and to the affairs of the Institute. On behalf of the NZPI<sup>®</sup> it is with special pleasure that I announce that Leigh Auton has been awarded a Distinguished Service Award.

In 1979 Leigh moved to what is now Manukau City Council in various planning roles. He became the Council's Director of Environment in 1992 and more recently, in April 2006, Leigh was appointed the Council's Chief Executive Officer. During his time at Manukau City, more than 30 years, Leigh has been an ardent supporter of planning, and its role and importance in a diverse and rapidly growing City within a cosmopolitan and fast developing region. His involvement in major projects has included playing a lead role in the provision of an environmental framework for Auckland International Airport, identification and planning for the Beachlands and Maraetai sewerage plant, key involvement in the Highbrook Development and the initiation of the Highbrook Parks Trust, a number of significant transport projects including planning of Te Irirangi Drive arterial and input into the regional rail and ferry upgrade. Leigh negotiated Manukau City's share of the Auckland Harbour Board dissolution of non Port related assets, the establishment of the Council's Maritime Recreation Fund, he played a key role in planning Botany Town Centre inclusive of infrastructure, zoning provisions and design and was responsible for the introduction of surveillance cameras into town centres in the City. In 1981 Leigh initiated the introduction of Planning Commissioners to the City and Manukau City now has the distinction of having the longest continuous use of Commissioners in New Zealand.

Leigh served twelve years on the NZPI<sup>®</sup> and was President of the Institute from 1994 – 1996. He was the driving force behind the development and implementation of a strategic planning process for the Institute itself, which included the establishment of goals and objectives for the Institute for the next 10 years. This process led to the development of a *Strategic Intent Proposal*, which was released in March 1995. Leigh provided the leadership in the development of the strategic plan, a role in which he continued as Immediate Past President. Leigh took the draft proposal through focus groups and conferences, and presented the Draft Strategic plan to the Institute Council in November 1998. Following consultation with branches the Strategic Plan was adopted in February 1998. This plan proved to be an invaluable tool for the Institute in providing it with a strong direction and strengthening its management structures to take the organisation into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Leigh has also been instrumental in the Institute's relationships with overseas organisations, in particularly EAROPH (East Asian Regional Organisation for Planning and Housing). This culminated in the first combined EAROPH/CAP/NZPI<sup>®</sup> conference in Auckland in 1996, which saw 850 delegates from 28 countries attend, including the Chinese Ministry of Works and other officials from Asian Countries. Leigh continued his association with EAROPH beyond his term on the Institute Council and has greatly contributed to an outward looking focus for the Institute and its relationships in the Asia Pacific region.

In 2005 Leigh was awarded the Institute's Award of Merit in recognition of his service to the planning profession. It is clear in 2009 that his proven leadership and personal commitment to the profession and his contribution to the Institute and to the image and practice of planning make him a very worthy recipient of this Distinguished Service Award.