

Village holds street party

By **MARIANNE KELLY**

JOHN Stancliffe felt “a bit like a marble in a barrel” when he became the first resident at a new retirement village.

“I was very much on my own and wondered if it [the move] was a reasonable sign of my stupidity or wisdom. But I decided I’m here now.”

The 84-year-old Howickian moved to a villa at Summerset by the Park, Flat Bush, when it was opened five years ago. Since suffering a stroke a year ago, he has since relocated into one of the village apartments. “It has worked out well,” he says. “Of all the places I could have gone this is probably the best.”

While he’s less mobile these days, he says activities within the village provide an active lifestyle. “You meet a lot of people you would not otherwise.

“We’re all looking for the same thing, which the village provides for. There are a lot of very nice people here. It’s just a matter of fitting in.”

Pat and Brian Downes moved in from Howick about five months later.

Mrs Downes says with fewer people in the village, “we had to make our own entertainment”.

“But there are a lot more facilities now and it’s a very friendly atmosphere. Having our grandchildren near us is very pleasant. Nearly all the residents have grandchildren, so it’s lovely to

mix and mingle with them.”

During the early days, 30 residents became “quite a large family”, says Jim Wide, who came to Summerset with his wife Joy, from Orewa.

“They knocked out a wall between two villas where we had a library, gym and kitchen. It provided enough for us and we made our own fun for the first two years. People who come here are aged between 55 and 90, so we have a big age spread and some very interesting people.

“The kind of atmosphere we had [at the beginning] has continued, although we have 300 people here and the village is finished at long last. We have no misgivings,” he says. “We have a very fruitful life.”

The \$115 million retirement village celebrated its completion with a street party last Friday. It was the largest and most expensive project for the retirement village development and operating company, which has 14 villages across New Zealand. Summerset by the Park was the company’s first in the Auckland region.

Close to 300 people will soon be in residence with the village almost at capacity. It has provided about 60 permanent jobs in the local economy and the number is expected to rise.

The village includes 183 homes, a mix of villas and apartments, a

52-bed aged care complex and recreation facilities, including a hair dressing salon, café, library, swimming pool, gymnasium and a blokes’ shed. It sits on 4.3 hectares adjoining Barry Curtis Park and is part of the new Flat Bush area development.

Chief executive Norah Barlow says the village has come to be looked on as the flagship development for the company.

“It’s by far our biggest in terms of financial commitment,” she says. “This was a project unlike anything we have embarked on before and seeing it complete is incredible. This is a good example of the way retirement villages are heading. It has fantastic facilities, a full range of care, and is impressive to look at. You could call it state of the art.”

■ Summerset is the third largest operator and second biggest developer of retirement villages in the country. It’s listed on the New Zealand Stock Exchange and, along with Flat Bush, operates villages in Wellington, Hamilton, Hastings, Havelock North, Levin, Napier, Nelson, Palmerston North, Paraparaumu, Taupo, Trentham, Wanganui and Warkworth. The company was named best retirement village operator in New Zealand and Australia at the Australasian over-50s Housing Awards in 2010 and 2011.



FIRST RESIDENT: John Stancliffe celebrates at Summerset by the Park’s completion street party, with Sharalon Sutherland, the village manager.

Times photo Bruce Nicholson