

# PLAYERS IN BUSINESS

Tim Mikkelson in action for the All Black Sevens in Las Vegas.



## TIM has them flocking in



Tim and his partner Tye.

**TIM MIKKELSON HAS SCORED OVER 180 TRIES ON THE RUGBY FIELD, BUT HAVING SOMETHING TO THROW HIS ENERGY INTO OFF THE FIELD WHEN THINGS DIDN'T QUITE GO TO PLAN ON IT WAS JUST WHAT THE NEW ZEALAND SEVENS PLAYER NEEDED AFTER THE 2016 RIO OLYMPICS.**

The former Waikato and Chiefs player, who was named IRB Sevens Player of the Year for 2012-13, said he found that his new café/restaurant/bar venture was just the mental distraction he needed post-Rio.

His business, Flock Kitchen & Bar, is in the idyllic beachside town of Tairua on the Coromandel Peninsula. Tim said that although he didn't realise it at the time, in hindsight the timing of the new venture for him and his partner Tyler (Tye) van Jaarsveld was a real positive.

Reflecting on the Olympics, Tim said, "It was tough because we trained extremely hard the whole year and it was four years of planning. You work so hard to get there and when it doesn't go according to plan, it is just plain brutally painful and disappointing. It was a challenging time because I thought it would have gone better.

"It was a real wake-up call, but it was good to have something else to take my mind off the Olympics, to be honest. It was hard at first. We hoped we would be celebrating, but instead it was a big dose of reality on the end of a paint brush as we put all our energies into our new café/restaurant/bar."

As the venture started to take place, Tim's mind state transferred: "I wasn't in the best of headspaces, but slowly as the project came together it improved. We had never done anything like this, so it was exciting. It was something new and

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Things don't always go according to plan as Tim found out at the Rio Olympics.

we got a lot of satisfaction out of seeing it develop in front of our eyes. It was a nice diversion from rugby."

From signing the agreement to opening the doors took three months. Tim used his time away from rugby to paint, sand and decorate the building – under the careful direction of Tye.

"It used to be an old restaurant, but when our landlord Gavin purchased the building he split it, which meant we got a blank canvas that we could make our own," said Tim.

Tim and Tye, who met at Waikato University where Tim was studying for a Bachelor's degree in Sport and Leisure Studies, were both familiar with the spot. Tye is from the Coromandel and has worked in the hospitality industry in Tairua, while Tim owns a bach there. He is quick to point out that he bought it back in the old days when the Coromandel was affordable!

The couple had spent plenty of time there in the summer, so when the opportunity came up they took a calculated approach, believing that the location and investment would be financially worthwhile. Tim relied heavily on Tye's extensive hospitality experience to assess the economic viability of the project. "I would say to anyone going into business, it is important to surround yourself with people who have industry knowledge. When you come from a rugby background you have plenty of transferable skills, but need to fill the gaps with people who complement your strengths," said the 31-year-old.

"We had some great support from different people and organisations including Good George Brewery who produce craft beers, Gavin who we leased the building off who is also a builder, and Tye's family who are also builders. They all helped us shape the place and we are very grateful for their hard work."

It was Tye who came up with the name Flock. The couple



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wanted their business to be a place where people would gather, so Tye got online, Googled the word 'gather' and 'flock' popped up. It suited their concept perfectly, especially given the local seabirds that flock near the beach. They've even ended up incorporating a seagull into their logo!

Flock opened in late spring 2016. Tim and Tye knew summer would be their busiest time of year so they wanted to get everything tested and sorted before the mad rush of the festive season rolled around.

The food they opted to serve is modern and fun with a focus sharing with friends. They focused on making Flock into a place where they would like to go and offering food they would like to eat themselves. One of the highlights of the café/restaurant/bar is the courtyard laced with fairy lights, which is a huge hit in summer and looks stunning at night.

"We hired locals to make sure we were supporting the area that was going to support us for all our roles, but the biggest challenge is staff and it is hard with rental accommodation being in short supply," said Tye.

With over a decade of experience in the hospitality industry, she has learned to trust her feelings and to not be swayed by other people's opinions. The couple admit they had to navigate through plenty of advice and opinions from other people, but in the end they went with what felt right to them.

"Just like a rugby team, we try to create a positive environment where everyone enjoys coming to work and interacting with the customers and having a laugh. We try to transfer that fun, holiday, beach feel to our customers. Our first summer was pretty crazy. It was full on and a real eye-opener. We think we train hard in rugby but this is a different type of hard work," said Tim, the newly trained barman.

"The challenge is obviously summer and

there are some huge hours. The fluctuation is something we have to plan for and you have to be super organised with pre-ordering over the public holidays. I now have a much bigger appreciation for the hospitality industry and how hard everyone works, especially during the festive period."

When he is not playing rugby, Tim is straight behind the bar, pouring beers. He says that it takes his mind off his rugby: "I have never done anything like this in my life, so it was a massive learning curve and it's been challenging but fun. I enjoy having a bit of banter with the customers. The punters love to talk about footy, which is always a good ice-breaker.

"What I enjoy most about it is that it is something different, but also that it is something my partner is passionate about and good at, and I get the benefit coming back to the beach to work. I have to give credit to my partner Tyler for her drive and motivation and for keeping it all going while I still pursue my rugby career.

"It is great to know that when I finish playing I have something else to get on with, and if I get into a bit of coaching later on this will fit in with it. As we all know, you never know when the career will end, so it is a great relief to have something sorted to fall back on."

### FLOCK KITCHEN & BAR

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#### HOURS

Summer: 7 days 9am-late  
Winter: Wed-Sun 11am-late  
No surcharge on public holidays.

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