



Ngati Pukeko marae committee chairman, Romana Kingi.

Whakatane rebirth taking place

A two-year-old mokopuna sits with his grandmother. "Kei te pehea koe?" she asks. His answer "Kei te pai" is music to her ears. At two years old, this grandson may know more Maori than many of his older relations.

But these two symbolise an important change in the life-style of many of the Maoris living in the Whakatane area.

After about 10 years of urban living, they are slowly returning to their culture, language and their maraes.

embarrassed.

"They missed the marae and sense of belonging. They wanted to return, to regain their self-respect and culture, and now they are doing it."

Many of the local maraes are being given a face-lift as more people shift back to a more traditional life-style.

Although the Town and Country Planning Act restricts the people from building homes near, or on, the marae because of controls over subdivision, they are travelling from town to be with their people.

"In fact just recently the local planning committee gave permission for a house to be built on the Poroporo marae land," says Romana.

"It is the first time in years and we hope it is just the beginning."

There are three main marae in the Whakatane area. Romana, along with other members of the Ngati Pukeko sub-tribe, belongs to the Poroporo marae.

For them, efforts to attract more people back to the marae began in 1974.

It was then that they decided to build a new dining room on the marae.

Romana Kingi, chairman of the Ngati Pukeko marae committee, lay priest for the Anglican church, JP and retired (Whakatane Board Mills) employee explains:

"Many Maoris had to move into the towns and cities for housing and work, and for a few years it was good. They were in a new environment and enjoyed exploring it.

"But then they began to feel lost.

"Many Maoris still have an inborn shyness and in a Pakeha environment they began to feel uncomfortable and

The new dining hall at Poroporo marae, Whakatane.

