

Marine exhibition has multi-mission

By ROB OLSEN

A LONG-RUNNING exhibition at Wellington's historic Old St Paul's church is getting out to the masses in more ways than one.

Entitled *A Friend in Need*, the interactive multi-media exhibition looks at the social and personal impact US Marines and soldiers had on the New Zealand public during their time here between 1942 and 1945. The exhibition began at the end of 2007 and runs until July 2009. Another component of the New Zealand Historic Places Trust exhibition is a school resource kit and the exhibition itself is likely to go on tour after its Wellington season ends.

"Many students have difficulty identifying with historical topics as they are not able to relate to the many aspects of history. They fail to see the relevance to their own lives. Both the exhibition and the education resource are designed to approach history from a very personal perspective and explore links between the past and people's personal memories," says Silke Bieda, Old St Paul's visitor programme coordinator.

The exhibition was especially tailored for Old St Paul's although it was quite hard to fit it into the church's format, she says.

"It's nicely tucked away. What's quite striking about Old St Paul's is it's a Gothic building and has all those little transepts and one of those transepts has been used [to

house the exhibition].

"We were trying not to disturb other people using the church and the exhibition is multi-media. The people who did it spent quite some time on how to accommodate it in the church, so it's free-standing and not in the way."

The marines were in New Zealand for about two years and about 1400 New Zealand women married US Army men. The marines loved to come to Old St Paul's for mass and it was a place for them to experience peace and quiet in troubled times, says Ms Bieda.

After mass they would meet local families and be invited into homes for lunch or dinner and then go back and meet the daughter of the family. A lot of engagements happened after Sunday mass, she says.

There are two flags in the church's nave – one with 48 stars – the number of states at the time – and the Marine Corp division flag. They left the flags there after the war as a symbol of friendship. "They really liked coming here."

Ms Bieda says it's hard to gauge the number of visitors to the exhibition. Old St Paul's is a bit of an icon and it's hard to tell who's coming in to see the church and who's come to see the exhibition. About 70,000 people a year come through. "We can't really say who has been there visiting the exhibition. A lot of people come and don't know the exhibition is on."

The number of classes that visit Old Saint Paul's is very poor and it's a



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DUTY CALLS - Don Jones (centre) was the first former marine from that era to visit the exhibition. He is pictured with US ambassador William McCormick (right) and US Marine detachment commander Leon Banta. In the city marines were based at Anderson and Central parks. Other camps were at Titahi Bay, Pauatahanui and Paekakariki.

brilliant place to history and this is just a living history example, says Ms Bieda. "The idea was how to get more classes to visit and we don't have an education resource so why not start with this exhibition and then develop one for the church."

A flier was sent out to 340 secondary schools around the country about the exhibition and the resource and how schools can use it. The resource includes a booklet, work sheets, tasks and activities for classes, such as visiting Paekakariki where there is a

display on the marine camp that was located there in the 1940s.

◆ The resource kit is free when you book a class tour of the exhibition and will be mailed out to the teacher ahead of the visit. Tours are \$2 a person. Alternatively the kit is available for sale for \$20.