

# 'We will keep fighting the fight for seniors'

**Gayle Chambers** is a familiar face as an advocate and voice for Grey Power Marlborough. **Chris Valli** spoke with Gayle after recently being elected Grey Power Federation National President.

When you first meet Gayle Chambers there is a feeling of 'the job is not yet done'. The self-confessed strategist and persona of democratic lobbying if you will.

Last month, the Grey Power Marlborough President became the Grey Power New Zealand Federation President at the Wellington AGM. There were two nominations. Fair to say, the results were 'overwhelmingly' in Gayle's favour.

"I wrote what I felt was a very good speech but I'm sure everyone got sick of hearing it before I went," she laughs. "I spoke from the heart."

The national body has 11 on the team with four executives consisting of seven regional zones and representatives.

Grey Power Marlborough currently has 4200 members, the second biggest membership in the country behind Nelson. An aging population in the top of the south for lifestyle reasons is reflected in the membership.

The support is testimony to the likes of Grey Power Electricity, a nationwide initiative, owned by Pulse Energy (new five year contract) with discounts that are benefitting seniors in a cost of living crisis. Other recent news for Marlborough's seniors is New Zealand Transport Authority (formerly Waka Kotahi) working alongside Grey Power to access driver licensing tests.

Gayle, 66, says when she turned 50, she and her husband decided to join Grey Power Marlborough. She has had various roles from secretary to vice president to member. She is

adamant Marlborough's seniors join Grey Power because they believe in the organisation and what it can do.

"From 50 you're then starting to think well, in 15 years I'm going to be looking at retirement, what do I need to do? If they can join an organisation like Grey Power they can get the support at a national level and at the local level with the discount book (discounts from local business) and people they can come and talk to," she says.

"I don't think the voice of seniors is being heard as much as it should be but we keep fighting the fight."

Aged Care Commissioner Carolyn

**"I have a real affinity with older people having worked in rest homes and home care"**

Cooper, a guest speaker at the recent Grey Power Federation AGM, advocates on behalf of seniors to 'improve quality of care and their lives'. Current issues seniors are facing are; older people renting more than ever, hearing-aid subsidies being too low, and subsidised oral health care being critical for ongoing well-being.

Gayle's own 'pathway' with Grey Power Marlborough came from an approach from current secretary,

Graeme Faulkner, who was her boss when Gayle worked at Red Cross.

"He asked if I wanted to join the committee and I said, yeah I would. I have a real affinity with older people having worked in rest homes and home care. These people out there have lived such a life, they have so much to share."

The voluntary organisation was founded in February 1986 by a group of superannuitants protesting against the imposition of a surcharge on superannuation, which was subsequently abolished.

Some notable Grey Power achievements over policy actions over the years has included the removal of prescription charges for those aged over 65 or hold a prescription subsidy card, the rate rebate scheme extended to include retirement village residents and the retention of the SuperGold card for off peak travel.

Gayle was born and bred in Palmerston North to what she says she would class now as a 'relatively poor family'.

"We were very lucky Mum and Dad bought a state advances house (now Housing Corporation New Zealand) and was one of the few that owned their own home," she recalls.

One of five children, she acknowledges her older parent's values such as respect were integral to her upbringing, and how seeking

**Grey Power Marlborough President Gayle Chambers is now Grey Power New Zealand Federation President after last month's AGM in Wellington. "I have a real affinity with older people....these people out there have lived such a life, they have so much to share."**

knowledge and wisdom from elders was a 'privilege'.

"You get brought up realising that they were aging and all the things that go along with aging," she says. "Like pumicing Mum's feet because her heels were all hard. It was about accepting their restrictions as older parents, we lost Dad to cancer and Mum died of a heart attack. Relatively young I was parentless at 32."

A Mum of three daughters, Gayle also has six grandchildren

and one great grandchild.

Gayle says she is still dedicated to Grey Power Marlborough and will continue on as President until March 2025 where she will then take on a committee portfolio to support seniors in the Marlborough community.

"I'm doing something I truly believe in," she says. "I'm out there fighting for seniors' rights. I take pride in that. We've got to find someone in central government who will listen to us."



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