

## What Makes West Auckland Great – By Leo Taylor from Avondale College

What makes West Auckland great? One thing about West Auckland is that it's old... in a good way. Whether it's kayaking up to the Riverhead pub, one of the oldest in NZ, watching vintage movies at the Hollywood cinema, a landmark still going strong since 1867, or just hanging out in Lynn Mall, New Zealand's first EVER shopping mall. West Auckland's age is not a hindrance but a source of pride, as it represents a legacy of traditions, achievements, and memories that continue to inspire and enrich us.

I've spent 99% of my time in the West and don't have to go anywhere else. If I want to swim? I've got French Bay. If I want to dance? I've got live music at UFO. If I want space to rehearse and perform drama? I've got Corban Estate. If I want to get some vintage second-hand clothes to thrift? I've got GOJO's. Or maybe I want to get out of the big smoke. I can go hiking out to Huia in the Waitakeres. You can't do that in Central. We got everything needed for good times.

West Auckland may be old, but it's not dilapidated. We have amazing facilities. Last year the Trusts Arena hosted the New Zealand National Fencing competition, which I had the opportunity to compete in. I didn't have to pay for a flight down to Wellington; I didn't even have to pay for an Uber; I could just ask my Mum to drive me. Thanks Mum.

The Avondale Racecourse is also a beautiful green space expanse in the centre of Avondale. I played football there when I was in intermediate, and it's just a great place to hang out with friends in the sun after school. Seeing a Horse Race at a Racecourse that's 135 years old is definitely on my bucket list.

While there are a lot of unique places, what makes West Auckland really special is the people. West Auckland is SUPER diverse.

Nowhere will give you a better picture of that than shopping at the Avondale markets on a Sunday morning. If you want fresh tofu, fruit and veg, antiques or just some hot chips, it's the place to be. Even on the way home from school, I can grab some panikeke from Ulutoa and Sons, a kebab from Kebab Factory and some fried rice from Green Jade if I get hungry.

It's been shocking with the floods and cyclone wreaking havoc in Auckland, hitting West Auckland harder than most. Some of my friends got yellow stickered, and my local pie shop flooded. It was tough, and the floods don't want to seem to go away, but I'm sure the community will pull together, and we'll bounce back, one soggy pie at a time. Overall, I couldn't imagine living anywhere else but here. I feel incredibly fortunate to have met so many great people and had so many good times.

West Auckland is the best Auckland, and I'm proud to call it my home.