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Nelson misses out on college

By TRACY NEAL - Nelson | Monday, 01 December 2008

Nelson has missed out on being the New Zealand site for a planned multi-million-dollar international college.

New Zealand United World College trust chairman Tony Baldwin said yesterday a site in Marahau had been favoured by the trust when it released a shortlist of three preferred areas in the country, including Queenstown and the Bay of Islands, but finances had ruled it out.

"Nelson would have been great, but it was inert. It doesn't have the pool of people interested in supporting it," Mr Baldwin said.

He said earlier that the Nelson City Council had shown the strongest support of any local authority and was keen to support the project in a practical way.

However, the tougher economic climate had forced a decision based on available resources, and the trust had been offered a free block of land at an undisclosed location, Mr Baldwin said.

He could not reveal where the \$74 million college would be built until final agreement had been signed with the landowner, but an announcement was due soon.

"Among the decisions we've made over a site was the level of support shown from an area. In the end it came down to the financial support we got locally," he said.

The New Zealand college would become part of a global network of 13 United World Colleges. It would educate and house up to 250 scholarship students from around the world. It would employ 85 staff and have annual running costs of about \$7 million.

United World Colleges runs a demanding two-year academic programme. Students are selected on personal merit, irrespective of race, religion, politics and ability to pay.

Nelson Deputy Mayor Rachel Reese, who had been assisting the trust in its search for a site in the Nelson region, said she was disappointed that Nelson had missed out, but pleased the college was still going ahead in New Zealand.

She was concerned that the economic climate might have ended the trust's plans, but the fact it was still going ahead would likely have a spin-off for Nelson.

"If the college is established, Nelson could be a feature of outer classroom experiences. We have a huge amount to offer," Ms Reese said.

Mr Baldwin, a law, public policy and strategy consultant who lives in the Nelson region, said confirmation of the "family" of corporate sponsors which included Contact Energy, NZ Post, Air NZ, Telecom, Fonterra, and ASB Bank, meant the trust had achieved its funding goal of \$850,000 to do the project feasibility study.

He said the economic downturn, which had shrunk the size of the philanthropic market needed to assist the venture, could impact on its development timeframe.

"The range of philanthropists is fewer in number, but they're still out there," Mr Baldwin said.

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