

Chronic obesity can be life-threatening but a surgical remedy is available here in the Bay. Michael Buyn is proof of its benefits.

# Michael ditches the spares

By PAUL DYKES

MICHAEL Buyn had so much weight to lug around each day that his knees used to ache.

At 144kg, the 1.85m-tall car salesman was morbidly obese in clinical terms when he decided to call a halt to his burgeoning weight problem and undergo a stomach restriction operation.

Now he is a trim 91kg and running half-marathons, amazed and thrilled by the life he has created out of the "last chance" given to him by Tauranga surgeon Robert Cable.

Since the LAP Band operation performed by keyhole surgery in 2004, he has shed about 55kg — the equivalent of 5½ car tyres.

That's weight he no longer has to carry around day after day — and the difference in him is plain to see.

"The biggest thing for me is that my energy levels have come up — I'm not tired when I get home after work. I enjoy a lot of quality time with my wife and two daughters."

Mr Buyn is not alone — three obese Bay people a week are paying \$12,000 each for the hi-tech LAP band surgery.

Tauranga obesity surgeon Robert Cable performs the laparoscopic "key-hole" operations to install the LAP Band rings around patients' stomachs to reduce the amount of food they can eat at one sitting.

Some of his patients are teenagers; the oldest was 76. They come from throughout New Zealand as Mr Cable is one of just five doctors in the North Island doing the procedure.

Mr Buyn was always "a big kid" right from schooling at Otumoetai Intermediate. From time to time he would work hard to get his weight down by going to the gym or undertaking a calorie-controlled diet but the weight always came back.

"I hit my target weight several times, but it always drifted back up. Eventually



I gave up and was resigned to being overweight." But a chance reference by someone got him interested in obesity surgery and he researched it a bit before going to see Mr Cable in 11th Ave.

"It was my last chance, and I was very motivated to get on with it."

Just for the one quiet moment he despaired at the situation he was now in, that it had come to this, but now he says that it was the "best investment I ever made."

The keyhole surgery to insert a permanent band round his stomach to reduce its size was a breeze and within weeks he was peeling off the kilos.

"I immediately noticed the difference. Within three to four months my weight was down completely."

He has weighed 91kgs for the past two years.

Mr Buyn said his initial problem was that when eating he never had a sensation of actually feeling full. Now, a small bowl of pasta or a chicken drumstick will do the trick.

"I'm probably at the point where I can eat what I like but not the volume. It's my exercise that keeps everything in check."

"I've thrown out all my big pants." He said people have generally been very supportive of his decision to resort to surgery and, although his weight was never a problem in his marriage, it's nice to get a cuddle from his wife in the morning and hear her say "I can't believe how skinny you are."



TALK ABOUT SPARE TYRES: Obesity surgery patient Michael Buyn has shed weight equivalent to a small half car tyres. Inset: Mr Buyn in 2004. Top left: The LAP band.

## His surgery turns lives around

TAURANGA surgeon Robert Cable is making a difference to the lives of overweight people.

"The lovely part of obesity surgery is seeing the way it transforms a person's life. Patients can lose about half their excess weight in one year."

While keyhole LAP Band surgery is not a quick-fix and required strict dietary discipline, he said, there were "ugly duckling" scenarios that propelled successful patients along as they got fitter.

"I have seen so many ugly duckling stories — two sisters where one is slim and beautiful and the other has been heavy even as a baby," Mr Cable said.

The World Health Organisation calculates there are 1.1 billion overweight people in the world, 300 million of them clinically obese.

The New Zealand Department of Statistics estimates there are 900,000 overweight people in New Zealand, about 500,000 in the obese categories. Mr Cable inserts the band around the top portion of the patient's stomach, leaving just a golfball-sized pouch to receive food. Once the pouch is full, the patient feels full and stops eating. Continuous eating would result in vomiting.

Once some of the food has worked its way through the narrow opening into the rest of the stomach, further food can be ingested.

A small cable runs from the inflatable band to a reservoir in the patient's chest, just under the skin. The band can then be tightened by injecting saline solution into the reservoir, or relaxed by withdrawing solution.

He said the common procedure in the early '90s was to staple part of the stomach but the LAP Band had taken over, being "10 times safer" and relatively simple.

"In Australia in 1993 there were about 400 operations done, all stapling. In 2003 there were 3000, nearly all bands. This year there'll probably be 6000, all bands."

Mr Cable, who was a registrar at Tauranga Hospital for 25 years, laments the way lifestyles have led to obesity — "... eating more plus exercising less equals gaining weight."

— Paul Dykes