



YOUR NEWS, YOUR VIEWS

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Crash site changes please US survivor

AN AMERICAN woman who was seriously injured in a crash that killed her husband Kenneth Stithem at the Hangatiki turnoff in 2012, says she's "thrilled" that safety improvements have been completed at the intersection.

The new SH3/SH37 Hangatiki roundabout was officially opened at a special ceremony last week.

The \$3.6 million project began in January in response to the deaths of two North American tourists including Mr Stithem on September 20, 2012.

His wife Kirsten Steinke, who suffered multiple injuries including a traumatic brain injury, has made a steady recovery since the horrific crash where her husband drove into the path of a cement truck while trying to exit the then T-intersection.

Mr Stithem died at the scene.

The couple were on their honeymoon.

"In the face of tragedy, a person can take one of two courses," says Ms Steinke.

"Accepting that terrible things happen, or examining why they happen and effecting positive changes, so

they will not happen again.

"I am thrilled to hear that New Zealand has chosen the latter.

"I will forever be grateful to the country of New Zealand for the excellent care I received after my accident, for making these positive changes at the intersection to save lives going forward, and for the beautiful and blissfully happy last few days I got to have with my husband."

Now, two and a half years on since the tragedy, Ms Steinke says she is recovering well.

"Thanks to the excellent care that I received in New Zealand, I have been able to work hard over the past few years and build up a nice life back here in the States."

Ms Steinke now works for Wings Over the Rockies Air and Space Museum and on the second anniversary of the crash - September 20, 2014 moved into her own apartment. She says the moving day was significant and that gaining her independence has at last given her a happy memory of the fateful date.

"I am working again, living on my own, and beginning the process of setting up a study abroad scholarship in



TAKING FLIGHT: Kirsten Steinke from Denver, Colorado has recovered well from a traumatic brain injury she suffered in a crash at Hangatiki in 2012 which killed her husband Kenneth Stithem (below). She now works at Wings Over the Rockies Air and Space Museum (above) and is a spokesperson for Denver's Craig Hospital's rehabilitation programme (bottom). PHOTOS CRAIG HOSPITAL

my husband's name at his Alma mater, Colorado State University.

"Thank you, New Zealand and the wonderful, professional staff at Waikato Hospital."

OFFICIAL OPENING

The new roundabout was blessed at a special opening ceremony on June 24 by Reverend Barney Winikerei.

Maniapoto kaumatua Pat Stafford led the ceremony, attended by more than 30 people who were involved in the project including representatives from Higgins Construction, Transfield Services, consultants Bloxam Burnett & Olliver Ltd, Waitomo District Council, Otorohanga Volunteer Fire Brigade and residents.

NZ Transport Agency (NZTA) highway manager Kaye Clark spoke about the project's milestones and thanked everyone who helped complete the roundabout.

NZTA principal safety engineer Michelle Te Wharau and project manager Biserka Stetic who oversaw the management of the roundabout from start to finish, also attended.

The ceremony was closed by Waitomo mayor Brian Hanna who said how important the project is for the local community to ensure that everyone travelling on Waitomo Caves Rd (SH37) can travel safely to and from their destination.



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