



Connecting People with Matheson Heritage

The Chair's Corner

We have all been shocked by the rapid and far-reaching changes the world has gone through in the past month or two. A global epidemic on a scale most people have never seen has upended normality for us all.

I'm writing this from self-isolation, as a long weekend break Sue and I took in Sydney turned out to be badly timed! At least we got back before air services were severely curtailed.

The Covid-19 outbreak has come at a bad time for this year's Clan Matheson international gathering. As I'm writing, the gathering is still going ahead, though these plans are being constantly reviewed and a go/no go decision is expected in April.

Any disruption would be a real pity. The host games, the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games in North Carolina, are really spectacular. Clan Matheson will be the 'honoured clan' for the games, so our Chief, Sir Alexander Matheson, will be honorary chief for the whole games. This would have been the first international Clan Matheson gathering for six years.

Sir Alexander, and the Chief's Lieutenant for the USA Colvin Matheson, have put a lot of work into arranging the gathering, which would be a big boost for the US (and Canadian branches), as well as a focus for Mathesons from all around the world.

We'll notify the decision about the gathering on our website. Options for any postponement or alternative arrangements are already being considered.

In the meantime, please stay safe. Keep physically (but not socially) isolated. Look after family, friends and neighbours. Be prepared for ongoing disruption. And wash those hands!

Andrew Matheson
Chair, New Zealand branch
Chief's Lieutenant for New Zealand



Inside this issue

The Chair's Corner

Andrew Matheson 1

Life member stories: Gordon Matheson

Alice Matheson 3

Piping Summer School 2020

Patsy Matheson 6

Summer Highland Games: Waiapu, Turakina, Paeroa

Rodger Matheson 8

Committee member profiles

Graeme Matheson 10

Matheson or Mathieson

Andrew Matheson 11

Clan Matheson news

..... 12

How to connect

..... 13



Isobel Murphy (daughter of Gladys Orum nee Matheson) went to a highland dancing summer school over the 2019/2020 new year period and got to participate in a Hogmanay new year celebration. She thought you might like to read the description of the night as per the programme...

Hogmanay!

Why do the Scots more than any other nation celebrate the New Year with such passion? Why should a tall dark stranger be a welcome first foot visitor after midnight, carrying a lump of coal and a slice of black bun?

'Hogmanay' is accepted as the Scottish New Year and regarded by some in Scotland as a **bigger** celebration than Christmas. Your MC tonight - **Alec Calderwood** - will guide you through a celebratory evening of dancing, song and ritual - with a modern twist!

You'll experience the **Address to the Haggis** immortalised by Scotland's national poet, **Robert Burns**, and eat traditional fare of Haggis, Tatties (potatoes) and Neeps (turnips) for your supper. A Haggis by nature is not vegetarian or gluten free!

At around 11.40pm, we will group together in front of the big screen for some popular Scottish songs - the words will be on the big screen for you. Following the singing, there is the symbolic reaping of the debris from 2019 and a sweeping up of the vestiges of the old year - we'll sing Amazing Grace while this happens - most people know the words but it's ok to hum along softly.

Then.... the clock strikes midnight...there is a knock at the door...it's the **First Foot**. The traditional bearer of good wishes and gifts ensures a happy and prosperous new year. The First Foot proposes a toast to the RSCDS Patron (The Queen) and the RSCDS NZ Branch President. And - you should respond 'Slainte' (pronounced slan-je!) as you drink your nip of whisky (or sherry or OJ!).

Everyone then makes a big circle to sing 'Auld Lang Syne' - generally two verses with interspersing choruses. Everyone then wishes fellows and friends a "A guid new year to ane' and all" with the traditional greeting - and enjoy some Black Bun and shortbread together before recommencing the dance programme in 2020!



Life member stories: Gordon Matheson



The family at Ailsa's 70th birthday. From left: John, Rosanne, Fraser, Alice, Sophie, Alan, Ailsa, Duncan, Ben, Alison and Gordon.

Gordon Russell Matheson was born in Port Chalmers Cottage Hospital on 6 March 1928. He was the second son of Donald Matheson and Marion Connor, and younger brother of Donald. Donald senior worked on the tug boats in Dunedin harbour, and Gordon spent most of his formative years in Port Chalmers, just outside Dunedin. His house in Magnetic Street overlooked Back Beach, and Gordon loved watching the boats.

Due to Government cost-cutting measures during the Great Depression, Gordon didn't start school until age 6, and enjoyed it im-

mensely, although he may have enjoyed roaming the streets of Port Chalmers on the way home more. His greatest claim to fame during his school years was representing Port Chalmers in the hop-step-jump event at the local athletics competitions, an achievement that was told to his grandchildren in later life.

Gordon was introduced to his love of music at a young age by his mother, and there were many concerts at home or at friend's houses. He learnt the piano and later the organ, and provide the music for many church services and family events during his life.

"Family remained the keystone of their lives until Gordon died in 2013. He will be always remembered for his shoulder-shaking laugh, his love of bad jokes and his complete devotion to Ailsa."



Gordon, aged two, with brother Donald, and cousins June, Betty and Alan, with Elizabeth Matheson

Life member stories: Gordon Matheson (cont)

The family moved in Dunedin, with houses in Pacific Street and Cargill Street. Gordon followed in Donald's footsteps and attended Otago Boy's High School, doing well in mathematics but struggling a little with French. This was during the Second World War and Donald, being five years old, served and was wounded in action (although not seriously), after spending time in Egypt and Italy.

After school, Gordon considered become an optician, but ended up working for a firm of engineers and surveyors, with an eye to an engineering cadetship. While working, Gordon took University papers in Maths and Geology, before moving on to a drafting cadetship with Lands and Survey. Eventually he found his way into a survey cadetship, and his path was set. Gordon travelled around much of New Zealand undertaking his surveying work, and many of the trig markers across the country were put in place by Gordon and his colleagues.



Donald and Gordon, with Gordon in his Otago Boys High School Uniform

“It’s a running joke in the family that you can’t go anywhere without bumping into someone from Te Aroha.”

Ailsa and Gordon met at the United Church in Dunedin, and after writing to each other while Gordon was away working, became engaged and were then married on 10 October 1953 at the United Congregational Church. Gordon's brother Don was best man, and Ailsa's sister Joan was the bridesmaid. After their honeymoon, they lived at 10 Wales Street in Dunedin, and John was born on 2 October 1955.

The move to Te Aroha was made in November 1956, and son Alan joined the family in February the next year. Gordon worked for and then became a partner of Williams, Boak and Partners, manning the Te Aroha office. Gordon was responsible for many subdivisions across the east

coast of the North Island, including Whiritoa Beach, which was later the site of granddaughter Alice's geography school camp.

Te Aroha held a central place in Ailsa and Gordon's life from then on, as many strong friendships were made there. It's a running joke in the family that you can't go anywhere without bumping into someone from Te Aroha.

Once John had left home and started work at Air New Zealand and Alan had left for University (first at Massey, then moving to Otago), Ailsa and Gordon got the travel bug and started adventuring. Trips included visiting Ailsa's brother Alex and wife Raewyn in Port Moresby, a trip to Ailsa's sister Joan and husband Gordon in the United Kingdom with a trip to Scotland to catch up with relatives and visit ancestral sites like Plockton and Eilean Donan Castle. There were also adventures to Noumea, Rarotonga, Bali and Norfolk Island.



Best man Donald with Gordon and Ailsa at their wedding

Gordon Matheson (cont)

In 1974, they travelled for four months across Canada, the United States, Scotland (where they met up with Alan), heading home via Russia, Japan and Hong Kong. The photos from all of these trips are extensive, as Gordon was a keen photographer and captured every moment. Ailsa and Gordon also had many local adventures, many of them involving Gordon's volunteer and social interests, ranging from driving the Te Aroha ambulance to hosting Sir Edmund Hillary at a Jaycees event.

John married Rosanne in 1976, and then in 1984, Alan married Alison. Both couples eventually settled in Hamilton, where Ailsa and Gordon joined them in 1990 after spending several enjoyable years in Auckland. While living in Auckland, Ailsa and Gordon were instrumental in establishing the Clan Matheson Society of New Zealand, with the first gathering in Takapuna in 1989. They were both shocked when 120 people turned up, and Gordon was appointed Chairman and Ailsa the Secretary.



Ailsa and Gordon, 1972

“Ailsa and Gordon were instrumental in establishing the Clan Matheson Society of New Zealand, with the first gathering in Takapuna in 1989. They were both shocked when 120 people turned up, and Gordon was appointed Chairman and Ailsa the Secretary.”



Gordon with sons, Alan and John (July 1984)

In Hamilton, grandchildren Ben, Sophie, Alice, Fraser and Duncan joined the family tree. Both Ailsa and Gordon were closely involved in the care of all five grandchildren, and attended many school shows, ballet performances, and musical events. Ailsa and Gordon were eternally proud of all five.

They also kept busy with various social and volunteering events, which included strong involvement with St Andrews Church, where Gordon played the organ most weeks. Gordon was also a JP and was an active member of Probus, with a couple of years as president.

In 2005, Ailsa and Gordon moved into the Hilda

Ross Retirement Village, which provided the support and comfort needed for excitement and experiences of their later years. Family remained the keystone of their lives until Gordon died in 2013. He will be always remembered for his shoulder-shaking laugh, his love of bad jokes and his complete devotion to Ailsa.

Alice Matheson



Gordon with grandchildren (from left) Fraser, Ben, Sophie, Alice and Duncan.

The Matheson NZ Award: Piping Summer School 2020 report

The learning started almost immediately once I arrived at summer school at Scots College in Wellington.

Jack Lee (a tutor from Canada) took us through the canntaireachd of the piobaireachd tune of 'Black MacDonald's March.' The canntaireachd is singing words or sounds that replicate the notes and type of notes being played. This helps the piper get an idea of the tune even before they've picked the chanter up. As I commuted an hour to summer school I was able to practise by singing the canntaireachd in the car. Before I arrived I could barely pronounce the word 'piobaireachd' so we were off to a flying start.

Each day consisted of a timetable of group practice, specialised workshops, and mass band practise. There was also the opportunity to have 20 minute individual lessons with the tutors. It was full on!

I was in the beginners' group and we started off by going through our selected tunes; Scotland the Brave, Battle is O'er and Green Hills of

Tyrol. Tunes that would be described by the young folk as 'absolute bangers!' These classic tunes are played by most, if not all, pipe bands worldwide.

Most students at summer school were at high school. But there were a handful of 'mature' students like me to bring the average age up. It was fantastic to see so many young people involved and doing well with their pipes and drums. There are some really talented students out there.

Tutors rotated around the groups each day, which meant we were exposed to different points of view and different personalities. The improvement from our group was noticeable from every session because of the intensity of the programme. It was really great though and I have already noticed an improvement in my playing. The expression of my notes is clearer and I'm better able to tackle some of the trickier techniques like the taorluath and various doublings.

In the September 2019 issue we proudly introduced you to Patsy Matheson, the first recipient of the Matheson NZ award.

The award was set up to foster interest in Matheson heritage, and to foster knowledge, interest and skills in New Zealand's Scottish heritage.

Patsy is from New Plymouth, and used the award to attend Summer School run by the Royal New Zealand Pipe Bands' Association, during January 2020 in Wellington. For more information about the Summer School see www.nzpipebands.org.nz/education/summer-school/



The Matheson NZ Award: Piping Summer School 2020 (cont)

The workshops were really helpful. These included tuning your pipes, improving technique, improving sight reading and memorising tunes. There were also sessions for particular tunes as well as slots for individual practise. I found these times invaluable as it was important to have a space to practice and consolidate all the information going in.

I had three individual tutor lessons, one with Marion Horsborough who helped me with a potential competition tune. A key takeaway from this lesson was a simple exercise she showed me to relax my fingers. This meant I wasn't strangling my poor chanter and could get the notes out nice and clear.

I also had two sessions with George Mason who is a piobaireachd enthusiast. I've avoided piobaireachd previously as I've found it quite intimidating. But George was able to break it down into mildly less intimidating aspects and there was more canntaireachd singing so we got through it.

I attended another piobaireachd session the next day and we were able to cover the 'ground' (the foundation piece of the tune) and up to the 5th variation (out of 8...see? It's intimidating!) Another young woman in this group was able to do the 6th variation, the Crunluath, an even trickier piece of finger work. This was an impressive show of playing.

Overall I found the whole experience really awesome. The quality of the programme and the skills of those running it was really high and I gained a whole lot out of it as a piper. It's also given me some great contacts for the future and has motivated me to stick at piping (as sometimes it is not the easiest instrument to love). I really appreciate the scholarship that the Matheson clan provided for me to attend. This was a really valuable experience and it has had such a positive impact on me. Thank you!

Patsy Matheson

"I really appreciate the scholarship that the Matheson clan provided for me to attend. This was a really valuable experience and it has had such a positive impact on me."



Summer Highland games: Waipu

Northland turned on a beautiful summer's day for the 149th Waipu Highland Games. With the Organisers wanting to put the Clans to the fore, the day started with a parade of Clans lead by the pipe band. We started on the main street of Waipu and marched in and around the park. The Chief of the day took the Clan salute.

While attendance of the public was down on last year we had a number of our own namesakes attend our tent. The most pleasing factor was the number of families that consisted of three generations. We need to follow up on these visitors and welcome the younger members to the Clan.

The Waipu district have over the past 12 months made an effort to recognise the Scottish heritage of the district. As you enter their museum one of the first panels mention the Mathesons. The memorial on the main street has had

an additional inscription added to it confirming one of the early ships was half owned by a Matheson. This year there were Clan shields hanging from every lamp-post.

Next year is the 150th anniversary of the Waipu Highland Games and once again the Organisers have asked that the Clans be to the fore on the day. Starting with a street parade with more Clan members taking part in the parade dressed in their Scottish attire. I call this marching under the Clan banner and call on all Mathesons and the Septs of the Clan Matheson (wear the tartan) to join us on the 1st January 2021.

Rodger Matheson



Summer Highland games: Turakina

Another wonderful day was had at the 156th Turakina Highland Games. The wind stayed light for most of the day and the sky was partly cloudy. Seventeen Clans were represented with members coming as far away as Wellington and Auckland. The games started on the Friday night with a lament played by a lone piper at the Turakina Cemetery followed by a celebration of Robbie Burns Birthday at the local Ben Nevis Tavern.

More than 800 members of the public attended the games which is known as Turakina's biggest party of the year. They were awarded to a day of dancing, piping, drumming and band competitions. Followed by a Haggis ceremony and a mass band parade. A number of these games have their own face book pages and if one has access to face book it is well worth a look. Particularly to see our own Clan featured in photos taken by others.

Rodger Matheson



Summer Highland games: Paeroa

Saturday 8th February was an early start for Chris, Eden and myself as we headed south to Paeroa for their 27th Highland Games & Tattoo. While we think of these games being full of piping, drumming and dancing competitions there is much more at Paeroa which draw the public from all over New Zealand. They are known for catering for the young by holding the "Junior Highland Games" along with a number of other events designed for the young.

The variety stage had continuous performers lead by the Topp Twins who were in their element.

The evening Tattoo was again one of the highlights starting with the band street parade followed by the mass bands, caber tossing and the address to the haggis. (I am still waiting to be asked to participate in the drinking). The evening was well attended by the public who

enjoyed a number of songs by the Saltire Duo.

Chris bought along a number to tea towels which were used to decorate the back of our tent. Again our site has been photographed and appears on a number of media outlets.

John Henry our Clan piper was also present along with the band he belong to which was participating in the band competitions. John Henry proudly showed off his hat badge, which is now a large Matheson Clan pin.

Rodger Matheson



Committee member profiles: Getting to know your committee

Each edition we will include a short profile of a few members of the Clan Matheson NZ society. Feel free to reach out to them with your thoughts about the clan, or if you want to connect.

Graeme Matheson writes:

I was born in Christchurch in August 1941. I qualified as a pharmacist in 1966. I spent 4 years relieving around the South Island and purchased the pharmacy in Takaka Golden Bay in 1970. I married Margaret Cook and we had two daughters and one son. I sold this pharmacy in 1979 and moved back to Christchurch. We separated in 1982.

In 1986 I married Ellen McCrae. I purchased a pharmacy in Papanui in 1982 and retired 27 years later. We have 10 grand children.

I have been involved in motorsport since the early 1960's and still compete in navigation rallies, and have helped organize tours for one of 2

car clubs I belong to. Our pride and joy is a 1964 Saab 96 which we take in Classic Car Tours.

Ellen and I have been to several Clan Gatherings at one of these Chief Fergus asked me to be one his Deputy Lieutenants.

I have been involved with the Scottish Society of NZ in Christchurch for several years, with five years as Chief.

Ellen and I have had several trips overseas since our retirement and are planning to go the Gathering in North Carolina in July.



Graeme and Ellen at the last clan gathering



The 1964 Saab 96

We want to hear your stories!

Stories are a powerful way of connecting us to each other and to history. We would love to share your Matheson stories in this newsletter— anything from stories about your ancestors, to stories of migration, to stories of Matheson places, to your own story about connecting with your Matheson heritage. They can be a paragraph or a page, whatever you feel comfortable sharing.

Send your stories, news and photos to news@clanmatheson.org.nz

I spell it Matheson, you spell it Mathieson ...

Which is right, and does it matter? Many people start out in family history research thinking that one particular spelling of a name is correct, and that other spellings are either wrong or at least indicate that someone is from another 'group'.

In my experience the further you go back with your family history the less certain you become about the importance of the difference. You do encounter more evidence that it doesn't really matter — at least it didn't matter to people bearing the name a century or two ago.

There are some good reasons not to be too dogmatic about surnames. To begin with, when permanent surnames began to be used in Scotland around the 12th century they were reserved for the upper echelons of society. Ordinary folk, such as those featuring in most of our family histories, began to use surnames only later. In some Highland areas they weren't the norm until the 18th century (and in parts of the Northern Isles the 19th).

In any case, what we use as a surname is only a transliteration of the original. To use McDonald/MacDonald as an example, Mac is a prefix to surnames of Gaelic origin meaning 'son of', so MacDonald is an anglicised version of Macdhomhnuill (meaning son of Donald). With no firm rules on how to transliterate a name from Gaelic to English there are variations in the 'son of' prefix, which can be written as Mac, Mc, Mhic, or M'. You'll even see M' used sometimes in 19th century newspapers in New Zealand.

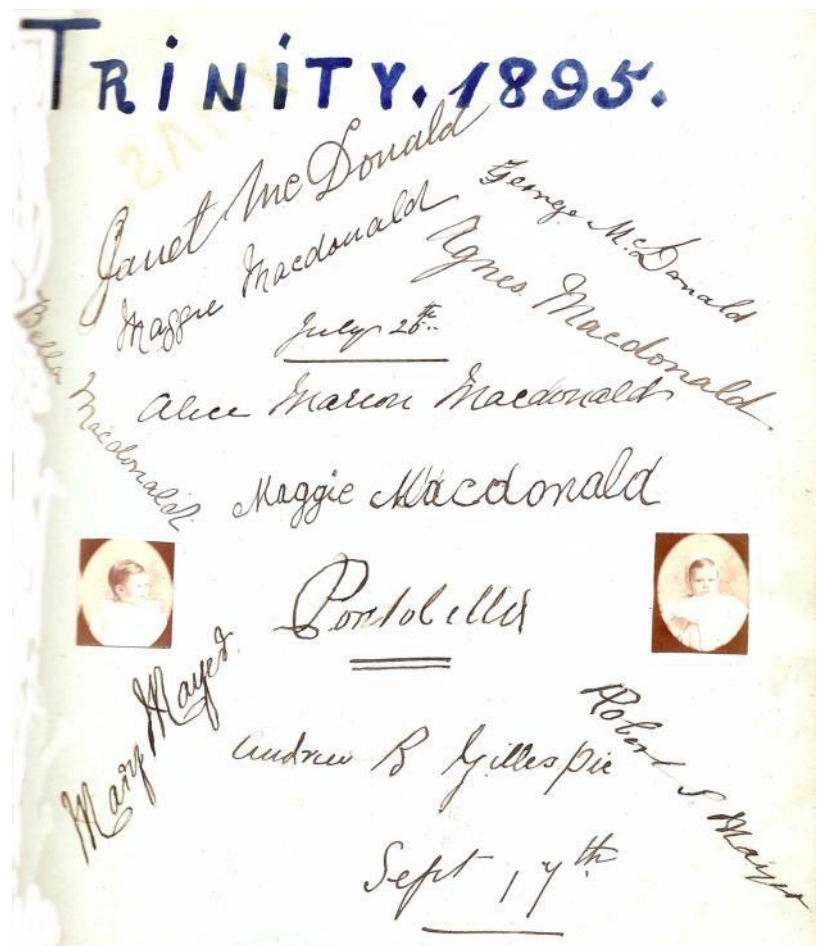
And even if people could read and write, they didn't seem as bothered about variations in the spelling of their names as we seem to be these days. Take the example of some relatives of mind, George and Jessie McDonald (née Matheson), who were often recorded as MacDonald or even Macdonald. In July 1895 they signed their names as McDonald in a visitor's jour-

nal. At the same time, several of their daughters signed their names as Macdonald. One of those daughters had a few years earlier signed an official document as McDonald. Many descendants prefer MacDonald. No variant seems more correct than the others, and for those who bore the name it didn't seem to matter.

The spelling of first names was also fluid. Another of my relatives was recorded as Catharine MacDonald at her birth and Catherine Macdonald at her death. My great-great-grandmother was recorded as Kathrine McLeod (or possibly M Leod; it's hard to tell) when her birth was registered and Catherine Matheson, maiden surname Macleod, when her death was registered.

So, what to make of this? It doesn't pay to be wedded to the importance of using particular spellings of names. And when doing your family history research, be alert to a person's name being recorded in different ways in different documents.

Andrew Matheson



Our condolences

MATHESON Selwyn Harold

14.02.1935~30.12.2019 Passed away peacefully in Whangarei.

Loved father of the late Brett, Jewel, and Ben. Grandpa of five. 'Farewell' 'Fac et Spera'.

A graveside service for Selwyn was held at Kaurihohore Cemetery, Apotu Rd, Kauri, Whangarei on Friday 3rd January 2020 at 11am.

Communications to the: "Matheson Family" c/- PO Box 5116 Whangarei

Joan Matheson

It is with sadness that we report the death in January of Joan Matheson, wife of Roy Matheson, one of this branch's founders. Joan took an active part in meetings and branch gatherings over many years, and retained her interest in the clan even when no longer able to participate — she looked forward to each issue of the newsletter. She was the last surviving member of the 'Gang of four' who were instrumental in establishing the branch.

Joan was the mother of Chief's Lieutenant and branch chair Andrew Matheson. She lived independently until late last year, when she moved into care in Wellington to be closer to family. She was remembered at a memorial service at Alandale retirement village in Hamilton, her home for 25 years.

Clan Matheson News

International Clan Matheson gathering, 9-12 July 2020

Grandfather Mountain Highland Games, North Carolina, USA.

For more information about the 2020 gathering go to www.clanmatheson.org and <http://www.gmhg.org/homepage>

Planning ahead

The next Waipu Highland Games, on 1 January 2021, will be the 150th, and no doubt the anniversary will be marked in a special way.

Before that, on 17 and 18 July this year is the 10th anniversary of Waipu's Art N Tartan event. Think World of Wearable Arts meets Scottish tradition, re-interpreted for the 21st century. Check it out on [Facebook](#). No news yet about any plans to postpone or cancel this event; hopefully things are more normal by then.

Missing link

New Zealand is as far from home as the Scottish diaspora travelled, yet the tradition of Highland games (formerly Caledonian games) is very strong. In an article about the Auckland Highland Games on page 6 of the last issue, we referred to an article about this phenomenon but missed out the link. Here it is: [Manly games, athletic sports and the commodification of Scottish identity: Caledonian gatherings in New Zealand to 1915](#), by Tanja Buelmann.



Joan Matheson

Clan Matheson Society New Zealand Branch

If you are a Matheson, Mathieson, Mathison (and other variants of the name) by birth, kinship, maternal descent or marriage, why not become a member of the New Zealand Clan Society and enjoy the benefits of friendship, fraternity and family history



New Zealand branch website

www.clanmatheson.org.nz

International Clan website

www.clanmatheson.org

Membership

membership@clanmatheson.org.nz

Newsletter

news@clanmatheson.org.nz

How to connect with us

www.clanmatheson.org.nz/about/contacts

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Join the New Zealand branch of the Clan Matheson Society to connect with others who share your common Highland heritage.

You will receive a copy of our quarterly newsletters and be invited to clan events. You will also be able to use the services of our clan genealogist, for help with your family history.

If you want to find out about membership or to join the New Zealand branch of the Clan Matheson Society, please go to www.clanmatheson.org.nz/join-us/

Don't forget to re-subscribe for this year.