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Camping ground's new look

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A winter spruce up for the camping ground in Martinborough has brought it up to a four-star tourism rating at considerable expense to the lessees.

The four star Qualmark – or tourism quality – grade in the Holiday Park Category, noted on the website as of an excellent standard, has been a long time coming for Martinborough Village Camping owners Frank and Lisa Cornelissen, who had opened a can of worms with a legal battle on their hands since their opening in 2005.

The battle was resolved by settlement in the High Court in April last year.

But this week, the legal battles were far from Mr Cornelissen's mind, who was on Monday awaiting the arrival of a technician to install wireless internet so that guests could use laptops at the grounds.

And the two are celebrating being one of three camping grounds in Wairarapa that has been awarded the Qualmark grade, which means it was independently assessed for credibility and professionalism.

Mr Cornelissen agrees that the grading, which he said would have been unreachable with the state the camping ground was in prior to the new developments and upgrades, was a milestone.

"It really is. It's confirmed to us that we're on the right track. We think that it in itself will generate quite a lot of business."

And Mrs Cornelissen said it is important for a place like Martinborough, which is known as a quality destination, to have a comparable camping ground.

The most recent upgrade to the premises, which is adjacent to the town's swimming pool, is the development of an onsite manager's accommodation and office building completed about two months ago.

Last year, two new cabins were completed, with five sleeping two and the other five, and prior to that, new amenity blocks were built.

The priority is now on landscaping, which had begun with planting of olives, cabbage trees and kowhai and moved on to borders, hedging and grasses, but recent flooding had held that up slightly. "With the weather it's been a bit of a challenge," he said. Most importantly, the beautification needs are getting



MARTINBOROUGH VILLAGE Camping owners Frank and Lisa Cornelissen are celebrating the awarding of a four-star Qualmark, or tourism excellence grade, after major renovation and development at the site. They are pictured outside the new manager's accommodation and office.

the first impression to the property right, which includes landscaping around the office. "We've got the facilities right, the accommodation right but we have to spend some time on landscaping, beautification and signage," Mrs Cornelissen said.

While the facilities look new and fresh, the campsite entrance looks bare and unfinished.

The couple moved from London after seven years there in 2005 and, with a desire to fill what they saw as a gap in the accommodation market in

Martinborough for upmarket campsites, found the town's camping ground, albeit in a rundown state.

So they took out a 17½-year renewable lease on the property and covered the upgrade cost, at "hundreds of thousands",

themselves to bring the place up to a decent standard.

"We came through and it was probably the shabbiest camping ground we'd seen," he said.

"Martinborough seemed like such a lovely place and the camping ground was in such dire straits

that we thought we would come back and we would have a go at it."

And they've certainly hit the ground running, with more than 3,400 visitors recorded in the past year and more expected with the new Qualmark grade.