



with love

Greg Casagrande

FACT FILE

Age: 43
Born: New Jersey, US
Home: Devonport, Auckland
Work: Angel investor, founder and president of the South Pacific Business Development Foundation
Education: Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University, Chicago, MBA; New York University, MS; Colgate University, New York, BA

THE TWO very different sides to entrepreneur Greg Casagrande are evident the moment you meet him. His business card is an early tip-off: Casagrande leads a schizophrenic working life making and spending money.

The second is the two curriculum vitae he has tucked away in his Auckland downtown office drawer.

One is for what he calls “microfinance leadership” and the other is for his “new venture leadership”. Put simply, Casagrande is an advocate of capitalism with a heart. Don’t misconstrue that for left wing bourgeois.

If you get him started on the present Labour Government he’ll probably shift uncomfortably in his chair, swing a leg over his knee, then stop himself before any profanities stream forth.

Casagrande came with his ideas and energy to New Zealand eight years ago because he thought it might be a good place to bring his family and smell the roses for a while.

“I wanted to live my crazy dreams directly. I wanted to go somewhere without all the influences I had had in my life, and just think,” he says.

For someone who drives a 1989 Mitsubishi Pajero, it’s hard to believe Casagrande was once climbing the ladder on his way to the top of the Ford Motor Company.

He was a divisional general manager for Mazda in Japan looking after budgets with lots of zeros and worked in emerging markets development and product development in both Michigan and Chicago as part of a nine-year stint with the company.

After what he describes as non-stop laps around the planet, and realising Ford’s “great corporate citizen” status didn’t quite match his own, he quit and left Hiroshima to move his family to Devonport in Auckland.

ness personalities manifested. Casagrande describes himself as a microfinance pioneer in one breath and an angel mentor in the other.

His inner-city Auckland office is where he has set up the South Pacific Business Development Foundation and several other profit and not-for-profit organisations. His business goal is ambitious, to say the least: solving the world’s immediate poverty by 2025.

It’s a fairly big ask coming from a small fifth floor office in a small corner of the globe but, like his name would

suggest, Casagrande likes to aim high.

When you flip his business card over, it’s no different. Casagrande loves investing in high-tech companies and he actually uses the word love. “It’s great. It keeps me sharp, all this high-tech stuff.”

He’s an active private investor for Ice Angels — a group of angel investors who fund start-up and emerging New Zealand companies. “There’s a tonne of money to be made out there for switched-on entrepreneurs willing to work hard.

“Now is a good time if you’re looking for money.”

However, it’s not like they’re giving it

‘IT KEEPS ME SHARP, ALL THIS HIGH-TECH STUFF.’

Greg Casagrande

Greg Casagrande came to New Zealand for a change of pace and now wants to solve world poverty. Photo by Getty Images

away at the door. Obtaining funds through angel investors and venture capital companies is something the rest of the world has been doing for years and New Zealand has only recently started to catch on, he says. Europe and the US are old hands at throwing money at small start-up companies with good ideas.

Casagrande himself has a vast number of investments — well, he’s got to, to help fund his philanthropy.

He’s actively involved in Biomatters, a company providing IT products to molecular biologists to assist in genetic analysis. Then there’s English-To-Go, a global online provider of English language training solutions, and Calcium — a digital e-marketing solutions provider.

— Linda Hawthorne