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£15m

The amount of money that Cornish Pirates owner Dicky Evans has ploughed into the club over two decades

Pirates owner wants to cement his legacy with new stadium

Cornish Pirates owner Richard 'Dicky' Evans makes no secret of wanting to turn his beloved club into the next Exeter Chiefs. And he is calling on the patriotic people of Cornwall to support the ambitious vision for the Stadium For Cornwall and what it can bring for future generations. *Olivier Vergnault* reports

RICHARD "Dicky" Evans makes no secret of wanting to emulate the success of Exeter Chiefs both on and off the pitch and see his beloved Cornish Pirates achieve Premiership greatness too. The Stadium for Cornwall is part of that future and will ensure that the

club is promoted to the top tier of English rugby and stays there for many years to come.

What many people may not know is that, over the past 20 years or so that Dicky has been involved with the Pirates, he has ploughed some £15 million of his own money into the club and the Stadium for Cornwall project to see it happen. A successful businessman, Dicky continues to do so to this day - not because he has to, but because he wants to.

For Dicky, a Penzance boy who made his fortune in the flower grow-

ing business in Kenya, Cornwall and the Pirates have been good to him and building the Stadium for Cornwall on the edge of Truro, along with the proposed new leisure, business, conferencing and hotel facilities, is about giving something back.

"I have Parkinson's so I won't live on for too long. The Stadium for Cornwall has been more than ten years in the making, I had to leave Cornwall to have a career. The stadium is my vision. Not only for the Pirates but for Cornwall.

"I think it will become a focal point and will help give young people even greater opportunities so they don't have to leave to make a career," he said. "I want the stadium to be my legacy."

Dicky has been a supporter of the Pirates all his life. He played for them when he was young, yet despite moving away to Kenya, his passion for the club and the county of his birth, has never waned.

With investment into players and facilities, the Cornish Pirates under his tenure continually rose up through the rugby divisions to reach the Championship where they have been ever since.

Twice the club was in the play-off final to win promotion to the Premiership through its sporting achievements on the pitch, however, their dreams of playing against the likes of Wasps, Leicester Tigers or Exeter Chiefs would have been dashed anyway because the Mennaye was deemed too small and unfit for the big fixtures by the Rugby Football Union, thus forcing the club to stay down.

For Dicky, the chairman of the Hemingways Holdings, a luxury hotels group which he founded in Kenya, the Stadium for Cornwall is the obvious answer and a move to Truro, albeit controversial for many, is the right thing to do.

"We are aiming to have a team of Premiership quality and talent, within the next three years," he said. "Being in Truro will help us attract new crowds. Penzance is too far for people and Truro is where the major towns in Cornwall are with St Austell, Falmouth and Newquay. It is more affluent too and more central. The Mennaye is surrounded by the sea and fishermen. Mackerel don't

watch rugby. Moving to Truro will help us tap into a much larger market."

While there are plans at the Stadium for Cornwall for a leisure centre, a hotel, catering facilities in partnership with fellow partners Truro and Penwith College and a conference centre, Dicky admits already being in talks with the college to



“ I want to emulate what Tony Rowe has done for the Exeter Chiefs,” Dicky said. “Look at where they are now. They’ve done brilliantly

» Current Cornish Pirate Tom Cowan-Dickie is product of the Penzance & Newlyn RFC's youth programme Phil Mingo/PPAUK



» Cornish Pirates owner Dicky Evans wants the team to emulate the Exeter Chiefs

Sports England too. But when the 'it's been dotted and the 't's crossed, work on the stadium should begin in spring next year with a completion date the following year, in time for the new rugby and football seasons to start.

"I want to emulate what Tony Rowe has done for the Exeter Chiefs," Dicky said. "Look at where they are now. They've done brilliantly. We need the Pirates to go up to the Premiership. We will have a core of Cornish players and will also be able to

attract players from the Southern Hemisphere, especially South Africa where I have some good contacts. We still have a partnership with the Wakaito Chiefs in New Zealand. They help us in term of coaching.

"If you build something people will come and that's exactly what will happen with the Stadium for Cornwall. Cornwall is booming right now. We have to get in on it."

The final design work on the stadium, which Dicky hopes will grow in capacity from 10,000 seats to 22,000 over the coming years, is well under way but, in the new year, the next phase of funding will start to make the Pirates' success perennial.

"We're launching a crowdfunding campaign in the new year," Dicky added. "We want to raise £2.5m with £1m going towards buying players and £1.5m going towards the stadium.

"That represents a great opportunity for the people of Cornwall to own a piece of the Pirates and be part of their success.

"It is about seeing the club prosper and grow for the future. It's not just my legacy for the club, it's a legacy for Cornwall."

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