

Well versed Southlanders

There have been two constants during the past two decades – petrol price rises and a bunch of mad ex-pat Southlanders uniting in Dunedin each winter. **Logan Savory** explains.

WHEN two third year students at Otago University sat down over a quiet beer in early 1989 they had no idea what they were about to dream up.

Disillusioned by the club rugby scene in Dunedin and contemplating their sporting futures, two go-getters came up with a plan.

It was in the social grade where Glen Perkins and Owen Eastwood wanted to take their rugby-playing days.

The chat over an ale led to the pair rounding up a bunch of former Verdon College and Southland Boys' High School pupils to enter a team in the Otago University social rugby grade for the 1989 season.

Initially the team went under the banner of the Southland Boys' High second 15 and the team wore Boys' High jerseys on game day.

However, this, as expected, didn't sit that well with the Verdon College members in the new team and a name and uniform change was mooted after just a couple of fixtures in 1989.

"It was about the time that Salman Rushdie had gone into hiding after Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the supreme leader of Iran, issued a fatwa calling on all good Muslims to kill Rushdie and his publishers after the release of his controversial book, *The Satanic Verses*," co-founder of the long-serving social rugby team Glen Perkins explained.

"... After Owen showed me a copy of the book in question, and in a moment of clarity, this was the obvious choice for the new name for the team."

Obvious choice or not, it is a name which has stuck.

PERKINS and fellow co-founder of the Satanic Verses, Owen Eastwood, departed Dunedin in 1991 to enter the world of employment and, in turn, letting go of their creation that was the Satanic Verses social rugby team.

"The Satanic Verses Touch team started up in Invercargill not long after this and the rest of the Verses history in Dunedin was picked up by a new gang of enthusiasts," Perkins said.

In 2008, a team under the Satanic Verses banner is still entered in the Otago University social rugby grade and is still giving ex-pat Southlanders a chance to unite each Saturday during the winter months in Dunedin.

THE values it held in 1989 still remain to this day.

The Satanic Verses team members are passionate supporters of the Stags, which has prompted the Southland rugby team to visit the

Dunedin-based club in the past during trips to Dunedin for Otago games.

Many Stags players have also made guest appearances for the Verses over the years, including hookers Clarke Dermody, Jason Rutledge and David Hall.

In 2003, when Rugby Southland was looking at ways to improve its bank balance, representatives from the Satanic Verses club approached chief executive Roger Clark offering to organise a coin trail down Dee St in Invercargill, as well as jokingly offering the Stags the use of its best player each year at no cost to the union.

"To be honest they've been a bit of a revelation really," Clark said of the Satanic Verses-Southland rugby connection.

"I get monthly e-mails from them informing me of how they are getting on and suggesting players they think we should recruit."

"They analyse all the strengths and weaknesses of our players and suggest reasons why we'd be better using one of their players. It's great if you're having a tough day at work, they've had us in fits of laughter with some of the things they've come up with."

"We'll certainly do something for them for their 20th anniversary," Clark said.

To mark its 20th season in existence the Satanic Verses RFC will hold a special game in Invercargill in August where a crew of former players will line up against the current Satanic Verses team.



The originals: The Satanic Verses rugby team in its 1989 season photo. Members are back row (from left), D Marris (Deano), B Scott (Miami), P O'Connor (Max), T Hunt (Sir), S Fogarty (Fogs), D Cook (Dirty Den), M Corswell (Cars). Middle row, K Chang (physio), M O'Connor (Mickey Doo), M Williams (Oscar), D Lindsay (Dur), C Robinson (Peng), M Kersey (Kooore), J Pickering (Cruise), A Bowie (Two Bottle), R Shand (physio). Front row, P Dawson (supporter), A Robertson (Robo), H Reid (Squish), J Simmons (Nutter), D Goodchild (Vid), S Dixon (House), M Henstock (Hen), G Perkins (manager). Front row, A Hamilton (Arthur Head), O Eastwood (Olive). Absent, P Thompson (Tomo), R Hagan (Snaps), D Scott (Red Eye), K McQuarrie (Batman), S Parker (Sifter), J Kirwan (JK), W Shelford (Buck), P Henderson (Ginge).



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