

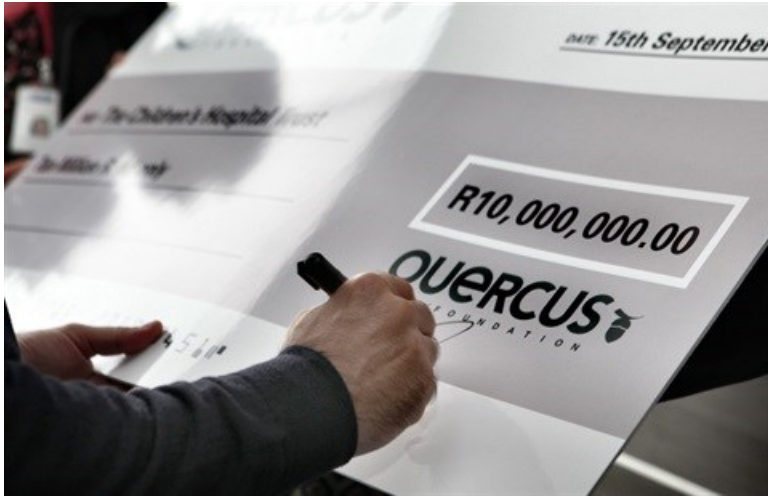
Breathing life into renewables

By  Nicci Botha

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Founder and CEO of Quercus Investment Partners, Diego Biasi, believes that doing business should equate to doing good - for the environment and those less fortunate. And that's the reason he's in town - to hand over a massive cheque to the Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital and to scout around for investment opportunities in the renewable energy sector.

"My parents were teachers and heavily involved in the village where they live. My mother still volunteers every day at the local hospice and my father is engaged in community activities. Therefore my philosophy is that business should be about caring," he says.



Diego Biasi puts his name to the R10m cheque.

Supporting Red Cross

That's why he launched the Quercus Foundation - to help provide healthcare to children in dire economic circumstances. His choice of project was also inspired to some extent by his business partner Simone Borla's death from lung cancer last year.

So the Breatheasy programme at Red Cross seemed a perfect fit. Many children who are reliant on tracheostomies to breathe have to spend long periods in hospital away from their families because there are no facilities in their communities to take care of them.

This programme trains the parents of these children to take care of them at home so they don't have to spend an indefinite

period of time in hospital.

Now the foundation has raised a R37m contribution towards the R100m expansion of the hospital's paediatric intensive care unit which will increase its bed-capacity from 22 to 39.

The new wing will also include:

- Accommodation for parents who want to stay with their children.
- Four isolation units to protect children from cross infections.
- Improving the quality of medical and electrical services at each bed.
- Improving the bed layout for better patient supervision.
- Creating a work station for nursing staff and a workshop for repairs and storage space for clinical equipment.

"If we can make a difference, even in a small way, we can create an outcome and example that will encourage others to do the same," he concludes.

Biasi handed over a cheque for the first of three tranches - comprising R10m - to Red Cross on Tuesday, 15 September.



[L-R] Louise Driver, CEO: Red Cross Children's Hospital Trust, Diego Biasi, founder: Quercus Foundation, Prof Andrew Argent, head: Red Cross PICU, Berenice and Nikita Scott.

The hospital is the largest paediatrics-only hospital in sub-Saharan Africa and takes in hundreds of children every year, many of whom are desperately poor, but have life-threatening conditions as a result of burns, disease and birth defects.

Biasi's fundraising efforts for the project included a number of glitzy events in London, such as Spring Gala at the famous Claridges Hotel and a pre-Wimbledon cocktail celebration, among others.

Investing in renewables

The financial crisis of 2008 prompted Biasi and Borla to look for a new type of business to invest in that wouldn't be affected by recession. This led to the birth of Quercus Investment Partners, which specialises in investment opportunities in the renewable energy field with a focus through solar, wind and biomass power.

"Renewable energy provides a two-fold opportunity for profit and protecting the environment. The infrastructure is stable and it is not linked to financial markets, so it had all the ingredients we were looking for," he says.

From 2010 to 2014, Quercus grew to the number five position of non-listed renewable energy funds.

"We think Africa and the Middle East is the next step for renewable energy investment, particularly in South Africa, Morocco, Egypt and Iran. It is a big opportunity, because of the lack of power infrastructure and the high demand for

energy and the cost of production is far cheaper than fossil fuels,” Biasi explains.

He says he is looking at opportunities in South Africa, but was coy on the details.

ABOUT NICCI BOTHA

Nicci Botha has been wordsmithing for more than 20 years, covering just about every subject under the sun and then some. She's strung together words on sustainable development, maritime matters, mining, marketing, medical, lifestyle... and that elixir of life - chocolate. Nicci has worked for local and international media houses including Primedia, Caxton, Lloyd's and Reuters. Her new passion is digital media.

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