

Tom Benson finalizing deal to buy Dixie Beer brand

By Katherine Sayre, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune

Saints and Pelicans owner Tom Benson hopes to bring the Dixie Beer brand home to New Orleans and is close to finalizing a deal to buy a majority stake in the company, a spokesman said Friday (June 2).

Dixie Brewing Co. LLC registered with the Louisiana Secretary of State's office on April 27 with Tom and his wife Gayle Benson, Saints president Dennis Lauscha and Dixie owners Joe and Kendra Bruno listed among the officers in the company, records show. The mailing address for the company is Benson Tower next to the Superdome.

The Dixie beer brand is one of a "number of business opportunities" being considered by the Bensons, who are "working through the process" for Dixie Beer, said Saints senior vice president Greg Bensel.

"Whenever an opportunity presents itself, like a Dixie Beer brand, whereby a company like Dixie can be reintroduced into commerce in our market, the Bensons will certainly do their due diligence with the criteria being on how it best will work and be successful in New Orleans and our region," he said.

"The Dixie Beer brand is unique to our city," he added. "It belongs in New Orleans. It should be owned and operated locally."

It would be the latest maneuver for Benson's estimated \$2.2 billion empire. In April, Benson, 89, announced he had bought Cadillac of New Orleans in Metairie, adding to his portfolio of car dealerships. That same month, he announced the sale of his majority stake in WVUE Fox 8 to Raycom Media. Benson had purchased the station for \$41 million in 2008.

Benson, who has been in the public spotlight in recent years for a public dispute with his estranged heirs over control of his sports franchises, said at the time that he had "very big plans for future investment in New Orleans" that would be announced in the "near future." The Advocate reported in March that Benson was considering buying a stake in Dixie.

Dixie Beer, owned by the Bruno family since the mid-1980s, never returned to its Tulane Avenue brewery after Hurricane Katrina. The facade of the building and its signature tower has since been

incorporated into a new research facility that's part of the Veterans Affairs hospital complex. The beer is brewed under contract in Wisconsin. The Brunos would remain minority partners under a sale to Benson, according to a source familiar with the deal.

In March, Benson announced plans to launch his own NBA Development League team to play during the 2018-19 seasons, and a selection process is underway for where to locate the team.

Benson family feud: How 149 words started a \$2.2B rift

Confused about the family feud among Saints owner Tom Benson and his estranged daughter and grandchildren? Here's what you need to know.

Meanwhile, Benson's recent legal troubles with his estranged grandchildren Rita and Ryan LeBlanc and daughter Renee Benson were settled earlier this year, although how any assets might have been divvied up among the family wasn't made public.