



Supporting Soccer Is Their Goal

Shootout celebrates 25 years of family fun and community support.

BY LISA K. HARRIS

The Tucson Association of Realtors Shootout celebrates its 25th anniversary this month. Organized by the Fort Lowell Soccer Club, the youth tournament for kids aged 4 to 14 has grown from matches between a few local teams to drawing 350 clubs, some from as far away as England. The family oriented event showcases individual talent as well as team spirit and skill.

The three-day Shootout, as it is known among participants, involves 5,500 players, according to Tournament Director Diana Cannon. "If you add in parents, coaches and family, there are 10,000 to 15,000 participants." Visit Tucson's economic analysis study determined that the event generates more than \$4 million for the local economy.

The tournament is the Fort Lowell Soccer Club's major fundraiser, and over the course of the event's history has raised more than \$1 million. "The funds are used for scholarships and to contribute to our community," says Marcy Briggs, club treasurer and official club "Soccer Mom." "We offer scholarships so money will not be a barrier to kids playing soccer."

Fundraising has been important these last several years because of the recession, Briggs says. "A lot of clubs have seen a drop in registration because families are cutting back on their use of discretionary funds, but our fundraising efforts have helped keep our club kids playing."

The Fort Lowell Soccer Club has given back to the community by partnering with Tucson Unified School District to develop lit soccer fields at both Townsend and Doolen middle schools. They also have built a lit walking path at Doolen, and both the path and fields are open to the community after school hours. "We chose to create the walking path there because there are no nearby places for the community to exercise," Cannon says. Doolen Middle School is centrally located at the corner of Grant Avenue and Country Club Road.

The 25th anniversary of the Shootout will honor founder Bill Viner and second tournament director Ruben Fernandez with Founder's Awards. Viner established the Shootout's format in order to create a community among players, coaches and families. A coach at the time, he sought an alternative to each team



eating alone at a restaurant on the eve of playing one another by establishing a tournament-wide event. Fernandez, who served as director for six years, doubled the number of teams involved and brought in the first international players. Both Viner and Hernandez created the off-field activities that make the Shootout unique.

"Our Friday night's Picnic in the Park is based on the Olympic Games' Opening Ceremony," Cannon says. "Teams march in a parade. Afterwards, we light a torch, honor volunteers and sponsors and showcase individual talent." Teams decorate themselves for Friday's events. One year, Briggs' son's team, the "Mean Green Fighting Machine," dyed and spiked their hair green and painted lightning bolts on their faces.

Individual team members compete with skills of dribbling, accuracy, juggling and the number of goals placed. "The juggling is

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Scenes from previous Shootouts.
All photos courtesy of the Fort Lowell Soccer Club.

always exciting, because players cannot use their hands. They use their heads, knees, elbows and feet instead," Cannon says.

There also is a talent show for younger players, where they dance, sing and showcase cheers that they have created. The show gives younger players an opportunity to express themselves, according to Briggs. "The Shootout gives them a sense of pride and confidence."

It is a family event for everyone, including the organizers. Curt Cannon, Diana's husband, manages tournament scheduling and logistics. Every team is guaranteed three games, so the Shootout utilizes 14 different sites with 63 fields. Daughter Amy is registration director and Diana's mother hands out medals to 8-10 year olds on award night.

Being involved with the Shootout is a labor of love. "We fell in love with the game, kids, players and families," says Diana, whose day job is as chief development officer for the Humane Society of Southern Arizona. "Neither Curt nor I knew anything about soccer when Amy, then a first grader, brought home a flier about it 25 years ago." The passion for the sport and what the Shootout brings to the community is what motivates the Cannons' involvement.

Former players return to help as well. For example, Briggs' son Jim, now on the Rincon-University High School soccer team and too old to play in the Shootout, will help organize events for his former



club team over the event's weekend.

Proceeds from the 25th year anniversary Shootout will finish paying for the soccer fields and walking path improvements at Doolen. "After we meet our obligations, we will decide what new projects we can help with," Briggs says.

"The Shootout has been able to do so much for the community," Cannon states. In addition to families like the Cannons and Briggs, the Shootout has been supported by Pizza Hut and the Tucson Association of Realtors. "Pizza Hut has been with us since the beginning," Cannon notes. The Tucson Association of Realtors has supported the Club for eight years and just signed on for another three. "With help from both major sponsors we have had year-round support, not just with money, but with volunteer time," Cannon concludes. "Together, we are all ambassadors for Tucson." **TL**

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