

Santa Barbara United

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Santa Barbara United
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Thank you for this opportunity to introduce ourselves.

We are the founders of **Santa Barbara United**, a youth soccer organization made up of a representative cross section of 12–14 year old girls, and their parents, from greater Santa Barbara, California. Operating under the AYSO (American Youth Soccer Organization) umbrella, our goal is to send a team or teams abroad each summer for a cultural exchange experience by participating in an international youth soccer tournament.

Last year, the inaugural year of what we hope will become an ongoing opportunity, our experience abroad consisted of a one-week home stay with local families in Lillehammer, Norway, followed by a week-long participation in the Norway Cup—the largest of the international youth soccer tournaments.

It proved to be a positive, eye opening experience that will last a lifetime for everyone who participated.

The Norway Cup (<http://www.norway-cup.no/uk/>) included 30,000 participants ages 13–19 from over 30 countries, comprising 1,500 teams. Santa Barbara United was one of only two teams from the United States. The sincere, heartfelt reception we received is hard to describe. That, together with the generous news coverage we got, made us realize how much the rest of the world wants to interact with our citizens on a one-to-one basis. The Norwegian families that hosted us and arranged the logistics for our stay are “pleading” with us to come back this summer with a new group of girls so that they can share their culture and we ours, once again. We have already reciprocated by inviting a number of Norwegian families to spend a few weeks in our homes in Santa Barbara this summer. Their children will train with our soccer teams while they are here.

We envision an ongoing “sister city” type exchange to grow from the seeds we have planted.

Why a soccer team? Soccer is the most widely played sport in the world. No matter what city or village on the planet, there are always kids ready to play a friendly game of “football.” Soccer is its own language—a universal communication vehicle—by which thousands of kids from every continent on earth come together in various venues all over the world. At the Norway Cup each year for one week they not only play soccer but they exchange pins and good luck charms, teach each other how to count or recite the alphabet in their language, or say “hello”—in essence establishing the foundation for friendship and understanding. This same scenario is replicated in several other countries in other international youth tournaments around the world.

One of the many highlights from last year’s experience is the day we spent with a Kenyan team made of mostly young orphans and former “child soldiers,” who had been rescued from the slums of Kenya. After our soccer match, their coaches and players took our players, parents, and spectators by the hand, back on to the field for celebratory singing and dancing.

With no band or boom-box—only singing, clapping, smiles, and lots of rhythm—they brought tears to many eyes.

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We then shared a picnic lunch, “spontaneously manifested” by our team parents. Our girls were joyous ambassadors, serving food and spending the rest of the afternoon with their new friends, each and all communicating in what ever ways their creative minds could conjure.

Arriving on the fields to play a game with the Vietnamese team, we were surprised by the number of cameras and news organizations present. Apparently, ours was the first sanctioned soccer match between teams from the U.S. and Vietnam since the war ended over 30 years ago. The news media interviewed players from both teams and broadcast the memorable experience nationally. (Please see DVD enclosed.) It was no wonder that so much excitement was generated by the two countries’ teams playing a friendly match; it is the premise on which the Norway cup was founded.

“The world’s biggest football tournament has become a social institution that performs extensive social and humanitarian aid...” (<http://www.norway-cup.no/uk/t2.asp?p=26711>)

During a reception for the team at the U.S. Embassy in Oslo, U.S. Ambassador, Benson Whitney, spoke directly to our team members about the importance of American young people spending time experiencing other cultures, and hopefully for some, spending part of their higher education time abroad to develop leaders with a strong sense of connection with the world community.

Santa Barbara United has the foundation and vision to develop a tradition of sending groups of young Santa Barbarians on an annual basis abroad to be our “youth ambassadors.” We will explore other tournaments and other country home stays in the future.

Our core group of parents and the team of magnificent young women worked hard last year to develop the connections and implement a system that will aid in creating influential life experiences for a number of young people from our community this summer and summers into the future.

Our goal is to raise \$50,000 to allow us to send a team of 15–16 players. The funds will cover the costs of air fair, ground transportation, food and lodging, tournament fees, uniforms, cultural excursions, and gifts to host families and players from other countries. Coaches, parents, and chaperones will all pay their own way (see budget). Our target date for complete funding is April 30, 2008.

All donation are 100% tax deductible (AYSO tax ID# 95-6205398). Checks should be made payable to AYSO Region 122-Cultural Exchange.

We bring our request to you knowing that you appreciate the value of cultural exchange and the hope for world understanding that lies with our young people. We thank you in advance for your support.

Sincerely,
Santa Barbara United

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