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news

Soccer tournament brings people together

Wish Cup runneth over with hope

By Sandra Thomas
Staff writer

THE FOUNDER of an annual charity soccer tournament that benefits sick kids and youth living in war-torn countries says while this year's event wasn't planned around the World Cup, the timing couldn't be better.

"We hold the tournament on the same weekend each year," said Adri Hamael, founder of the Wish Cup Soccer Tournament, now in its third year. "This year it just happens to coincide with the World Cup [of soccer] and World Peace Forum."

The Wish Cup tournament, scheduled for June 24 and 25, includes more than 400 soccer players competing in men's, women's and co-ed games. Hamael says soccer fans concerned about missing World Cup games on TV during the Wish Cup event need not worry—a jumbo outdoor screen will broadcast the World Cup games non-stop.

The weekend-long festival offers an international lineup of music and entertainment including belly dancing, Brazilian samba, Cuban and Latino salsa, Polish dancers, a barbecue and a beer garden.

Palestinian-born Hamael said the international theme is the focus of Wish Cup, which was inspired by the bravery of children living with life-threatening illnesses and his hope for peace among children and youth living in countries torn apart by war. Proceeds from the event will go to the Make A Wish Foundation of B.C. and the Yukon, for which the 35-year-old Hamael is a long-time volunteer, and the Creative Peace Network Society, which he founded three years ago.

Hamael, who owns a limousine rental and tourism company, uses the peace society to bring together 12 youth from Palestine, 12 from Israel, and eight from Canada at the Gulf Islands Film and Television School. The Israeli/Palestinian conflict has raged on for more than 60 years. At film camp youths film each other telling stories of their lives for a project called Peace it Together. Hamael calls the experience "extraordinary."

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—Adri Hamael



"It's a way for these youth to break the cycle of violence for the next generation," said Hamael. "They see that they are all human beings, even those who are their enemies. They see there are no monsters here."

Hamael said the project has long-reaching effects. Four weeks ago he returned from a visit to the Middle East, where he followed up with youth involved in last year's project.

"They have a new perspective," he said. "I don't get paid for the long hours I put in, but seeing their positive attitudes is my gain."

Hamael has seen first-hand the positive impact sports can have on kids living in refugee camps and children of war, during his travels through the Middle East and Africa. In the early 1990s he spent two years as a relief aid worker in south Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Egypt where he worked with refugees and street children.

"As a Canadian, as I survey the conflicts in the Middle East and how they impact even Canada, I dream that through events such as the Wish Cup, sport will continue to unite people and cultures together," Hamael said.

Closer to home, Hamael and his tournament also benefit the Make a Wish Foundation, where he volunteers as a "wish granter." He said a 17-year-old soccer fan from Campbell River, living with a life-threatening illness, is now in Germany with his family enjoying the World Cup through a wish Hamael organized.

For more information go to www.wish-cup.ca.