

SSVCF Launches Private Campaign to Build a Field House at the Umberto Abronzino Soccer Bowl at Watson Park

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE (July 19, 2012) -- Soccer Silicon Valley Community Foundation has joined with the San Jose Parks Foundation, the local neighborhood, and San Jose Earthquakes all-star defender Steven Beitashour on a private fundraising campaign to build a field house at "ground zero" for soccer in San Jose, the city-owned former "Watson Bowl," now known as the Umberto Abronzino Soccer Bowl in honor of the man who helped kick-start recreational soccer play on that patch of grass in an area that has developed into Soccer City, USA.

The goal of the "Abronzino Field House Project" is to privately raise a quarter million dollars through targeted charitable donations to the "Abronzino Fund," administered by the 501c(3) non-profit San Jose Parks Foundation, in order to build a 2,500 facility which would allow the adjacent Abronzino Bowl soccer fields to be privately managed and maintained and which would serve as a showpiece for the most vibrant soccer community in the country. Donations to the Abronzino Fund can be made online at http://www.sanjoseparks.org/the_abronzino_fund.

Watson Park, built on a former San Jose city dump, was closed for several years for toxic remediation. In August 2011, the park re-opened, and the soccer bowl now contains two beautiful new fields, one grass and one artificial turf, both with lights to allow night play, on land known by every local recreational soccer player over the past four decades as Watson Bowl.

The master plan for what is now known as the Abronzino Bowl includes a soccer field house replete with restrooms, concessions, office space, storage – and a permanent exhibit wall on the late Umberto Abronzino and the history of recreational and amateur soccer in Silicon Valley curated by the local history museum, History San Jose. However, the financially-strapped City of San Jose has no funding allocated to actually build the facility within the foreseeable future.

Which is where the surrounding Northside neighborhood and the South Bay soccer community step in. SSVCF has assembled a blue-ribbon committee to spearhead an effort to privately finance the building of the field house. The committee, chaired by Abronzino's adult children, Linda & Al, also includes, among others, city councilman Sam Liccardo, San Jose Parks Foundation executive director James Reber, San Jose Earthquakes team president Dave Kaval, History San Jose executive director Alida Bray, the city parks department's capital projects director Matt Cano, Friends of Watson Park chair Carol Beebe, an architect (Lawrence De Santis) and project manager (Corky Silva) from Barry Swenson Builder, and Beitashour, the all-star San Jose Earthquakes defender who was born and raised in San Jose, attended Leland High and played recreationally on the Almaden Valley Youth Soccer League, as celebrity spokesperson.

Private investment in the local soccer infrastructure is sorely needed and the Abronzino Bowl is the perfect place to start.

In March 2011, says SSVCF president Don Gagliardi, the *Portland Oregonian* published the results of its systematic study, akin to how *U.S. News & World Report* ranks colleges, and determined that San Jose captured the crown as "Soccer City U.S.A." based upon the tremendous amount of recreational soccer play in this area. The demand for soccer fields in San Jose alone is such that the city has a backlog of more than 50 fields that need to be built to meet it.

In the nation's premier soccer city, the Abronzino Bowl is its most hallowed ground. As the *San Jose Mercury News* reported in his 2006 obituary, although Abronzino lived in the Willow Glen neighborhood, "[h]is home, however, was truly at Watson Bowl . . ."

"Only twenty years ago, the national champions of American soccer were a bunch of amateurs playing on this very field," Gagliardi says of the 1992 U.S. Open Cup champion San Jose Oaks, who hosted home matches at Watson Bowl. "That's how rarified this place is. And it doesn't even have restrooms."

We can make the dream a reality," says Gagliardi. "Our motto is 'building community through soccer,' and what better way than to bring our community of soccer players and fans to build a beautiful field house that will benefit untold numbers of youth and recreational soccer players as well as serve as a shrine to San Jose's role as 'Soccer City U.S.A.'"

"Thanks to everyone involved in this venture," says Linda Abronzino. "I know our dad would be very proud to see the community supporting the game he loved. Soccer has come a long way in San Jose since 1957."

"I think this is a great cause, and I'm honored to be affiliated with it," says Beitashour.

The Abronzino Field House Committee:

Al & Linda Abronzino (Committee Co- Chairs)
Carol Beebe (Chair, Friends of Watson Park)
Steven Beitashour (San Jose Earthquakes Defender)
Alida Bray (History San Jose Executive Director)
Matt Cano (San Jose Parks & Recreation Capital Projects)
Lawrence DeSantis (Architect, Barry Swenson Builder)
Don Gagliardi (SSVCF President & 13th Street NAC President)
Justin Garcia (City National Bank)
John Jussen (Almaden Valley Youth Soccer League Past President and SSV/CF Board Member)
Dave Kaval (San Jose Earthquakes President)
Sam Liccardo (San Jose City Councilmember)
James Reber (San Jose Parks Foundation Executive Director)
Nat Robinson (Strong Neighborhoods Initiative Leader)
Corky Silva (Project Manager, Barry Swenson Builder)

About Soccer Silicon Valley Community Foundation: Soccer Silicon Valley Community Foundation (SSVCF), formed in 2007, is an all-volunteer 501c(3) non-profit organization comprised of San Jose Earthquakes fans dedicated to building community through soccer. SSVCF engages Earthquakes fans and players in various charitable initiatives locally, nationally and even internationally. SSVCF, the first organization of its kind in American professional sports, embraces the notion that a pro sports fan-base can organically capture the spirit of a club, as opposed to being mere customers, by working together with the team's players and management on doing good works in the community. www.ssvcf.org.

About the San Jose Parks Foundation: San Jose Parks Foundation is a 501c(3) non-profit organization designed to support the City of San Jose's public parks through public / private partnerships, including building a private endowment to support San Jose parks in perpetuity. www.sanjoseparks.org.

About Friends of Watson Park: Friends of Watson Park engages surrounding neighborhood residents who are dedicated to maintaining and improving the park. The group, which meets monthly and will be celebrating the one-year anniversary

of the re-opening of the park on August 25, is an official subcommittee of the 13th Street Neighborhood Advisory Committee (13th St. NAC), a 501c(3) non-profit organization which is part of San Jose's Strong Neighborhoods Initiative (SNI). 13th St. NAC comprises four local neighborhood associations, a business association, and several Friends groups supporting its local public parks, pool and library. www.13thstnac.org.

About History San Jose: History San Jose, which serves as the city's history museum, collects, preserves and celebrates the stories of diversity and innovation in San Jose and the Santa Clara Valley. History San Jose has partnered with SSVCF and the San Jose Earthquakes on the "Soccer Legacy Project" to showcase San Jose's soccer heritage in permanent exhibit displays in the Earthquakes' upcoming new stadium and at the Abronzino Field House. History San Jose recently curated an exhibit at San Jose City Hall, "City of Champions: 2001, a San Jose Soccer Odyssey." www.historysanjose.org.

About San Jose Earthquakes: The San Jose Earthquakes are a Major League Soccer (MLS) franchise that has won two MLS Cup championships (2001 & 2003), a Supporter Shield for the league's best regular season record (2005), and currently is among the league leaders in the 2012 standings. The Earthquakes anticipate opening their new stadium in land adjacent to the airport before the 2014 season. www.sjearthquakes.com.

About Steven Beitashour: San Jose Earthquakes defender Steven Beitashour is a local product, born and raised in San Jose, and graduated from Leland High School, and San Diego State. He played recreational soccer in the Almaden Valley Youth Soccer League and amateur soccer for the San Jose Frogs at PAL Stadium. Drafted by his hometown San Jose Earthquakes in 2010, Beitashour, who is among the finest soccer players in the United States, was recently designated MLS "Best Eleven" and named to the starting line-up for the MLS All-Star Game in Philadelphia on July 25, where the MLS All-Stars, including internationally-known players like David Beckham, Landon Donovan and Thierry Henry, will take on European club champion Chelsea of the English Premier League. Beitashour, who is of Iranian descent, is being courted by the Iranian national team and has also been mentioned as a potential candidate for the U.S. national team for the 2014 World Cup.

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History San Jose – Aida Bray, Executive Director, (408) 918-1041, abray@historysanjose.org.

Barry Swenson Builder – Corky Silva, Project Manager, (408) 938-6328, csilva@barryswensonbuilder.com

Linda Abronzino, Abronzino Field House Committee Chair, (408) 885-9131, linda@abronzino.net

Steven Beitashour, Abronzino Field House Committee Celebrity Spokesperson, may be contacted about the Abronzino Project through Don Gagliardi.