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# MIZZOU

## Need for Soccer

**A professional soccer team's profits support the special-needs community.**



Although goalkeeper Jeremy Vuolo hails from Philadelphia, Penn., he likes playing soccer for the San Antonio Scorpions in part because of the team's involvement in Soccer for a Cause. Any profits from the program go to support Morgan's Wonderland, a theme park that's free and accessible to people with special needs. Photo courtesy of the San Antonio Scorpions.

*Story by Dale Smith*

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**A**t first, Bob McCullough's career in corporate public relations sounds a tad eclectic. Since McCullough, MA '72, moved back home to Texas that year, he has directed

communications in the launch not only of SeaWorld San Antonio but also of Morgan's Wonderland, a theme park in San Antonio designed with special-needs individuals in mind. And in 2013 he and his teammates were winners in the Silver Anvil competition of the Public Relations Society of America for their work building grassroots support in the startup of the San Antonio Scorpions pro soccer team.

It turns out that South Texas soccer and special-needs entertainment are more closely linked than one might think. Morgan's Wonderland, which opened in 2010 with fanfare from national news media, is unique for its wheelchair accessibility for every ride, and admission is free to anyone with a special need — more than a quarter of its visitors. Local entrepreneur Gordon Hartman and wife Maggie, whose daughter Morgan has cognitive and physical challenges, dreamed up the idea.

Hartman might be a loving father, but he's also a businessman, and he knew he had to supplement the park's admissions revenue. Although Hartman never played soccer, his research revealed that San Antonio had pent-up demand for the beautiful game. So, for starters, in 2010 he built STAR Soccer, 13 tournament-quality soccer fields that generate revenue for nonprofit Morgan's Wonderland. And he asked McCullough and a small group of passionate staff members to start talking up the idea of bringing a North American Soccer League team to town. The NASL is one rung below the top professional league,

Major League Soccer. For McCullough, the work was both professional and personal. His daughter Connally, 14, has cognitive and speech delays.

Hartman, McCullough and others involved in the Soccer for a Cause effort met with business and civic leaders, as well as with local news media to grow the grassroots support for professional soccer in San Antonio. The *San Antonio Express-News* jumped on board and publicized a series of contests in which members of the public offered ideas for team names, and for the designs of its logo and uniform. The Silver Anvil award recognizes the communications campaign that built enthusiasm for the new team, which started in 2012. The Soccer for a Cause campaign continues as the Scorpions now compete at their new stadium home, Toyota Field.

McCullough says average attendance at Scorpions games is more than 7,000, and the new team – along with STAR Soccer and Toyota Field – is forecast to turn a profit that supports the theme park. For him, all the dollars and cents, business decisions and media contacts add up to a labor of love on behalf of Connally and the special-needs community.

**Topics:** [Alumni](#), [Web Exclusives](#)

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