



Giving LACROSSE

PACIFIC SOUTHWEST REGION

FUEL THE GROWTH ★ ENRICH THE EXPERIENCE ★ FIELD THE BEST NATIONAL TEAMS

PELA Providing Community-Based Play for SoCal Girls

BY PAUL OHANIAN

AS SOMEONE WHO EARNS HIS LIVING in California’s entertainment industry, hearing the popular movie phrase, “If you build it, they will come” from Stephen Fossati, founder of the Pacific Edge Lacrosse Association, seemed utterly appropriate. After all, a field of dreams can apply to any sport.

For Fossati, the dream started eight years ago when his oldest daughter Sophia, a fifth grader at the time, began playing lacrosse in a five-week winter session. Unfortunately, as spring arrived and Sophia asked to keep playing, Fossati found limited opportunities available.

“The Los Angeles lacrosse environment at that time seemed to be mostly focused on boys’ programs,” Fossati said. “We had about 15 girls for a new team, but we couldn’t find a league to join. So, we decided to start our own.”

That’s how the Pacific Edge Lacrosse Association, the first all-girls league in Los Angeles, came into being in the spring of 2015. The first season featured about 70 girls split over six teams, with a strong start-up feeling.

“We played a lot of 7-v-7 and 8-v-8 that season,” Fossati said.

But as word about the all-girls league began to spread, more programs throughout the Greater Los Angeles area added girls’ teams. PELA became the main umbrella organization that coordinated the schedules, secured field space, and established the guidelines. Fossati credits support from USA Lacrosse as a significant reason for the league’s growth.

“Having the backing of USA Lacrosse was a strong



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statement to the lacrosse community. It allowed us to establish a strong culture of how things would be done,” he said. “It made a difference.”

Serving girls ages 5 to 15, PELA’s mantra states “We believe in giving girls the opportunity, through lacrosse, to grow, learn, achieve, and face challenges together so as to nurture in each of them leadership, self-esteem, and a sense of community.”

The organization is run by an all-volunteer board, with Fossati still active in a leadership role. In addition to coordinating play for established teams, Pacific Edge seeks to spread the game by supporting start-ups with free player clinics, coaching assistance, and additional resources.

“PELA provides a lot of scholarships in emerging areas that cannot afford full team registration fees,” said Gabe Fowler, USA Lacrosse’s regional manager for the Pacific Southwest. “They have been doing this for years and this is yet another way to remove barriers from the sport in the SoCal footprint.”

By 2019, Fossati estimates that the league had about 720 participants and lots of momentum. Then COVID arrived, and like sports leagues everywhere, PELA was hit hard.

Now three years removed from the height of the pandemic, PELA’s participation numbers have rebounded, with nearly 600 players and 35 teams during the 2023 spring season.

“The power and importance that sports can provide in the development of kids is incredible,” Fossati said. “That’s the reason we do this.”

- ▶ The USA Lacrosse Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that serves as the philanthropic arm of USA Lacrosse. The Foundation helps drive the three main pillars of the USA Lacrosse mission: 1) Fuel the growth; 2) Enrich the experience; 3) Field the best national teams. Supporting the foundation provides thousands of children across the country the opportunity to experience the gift of lacrosse. To learn more about the USA Lacrosse Foundation, please visit usalacrosse.com/foundation

National Scope, LOCAL IMPACT

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Each year, USA Lacrosse receives hundreds of applications for grants designed to **Fuel the Growth** of the game. Grants are available for equipment, player clinics and financial support. The USA Lacrosse Foundation is committed to raising the dollars needed to fund as many of these grants as possible. Philanthropic support from members, partners, and friends is critical in providing these opportunities for players, coaches, and officials in every region across the country.

The **Pacific Southwest** region includes **Arizona, California (SOCAL), Hawaii, New Mexico, and Nevada**. Applications received during the 2023 grant cycle are currently being reviewed with award notifications going out later this year, which means there's still time to invest in the growth of the game in your own backyard!

Here is breakdown of the applications submitted from your region:

32

Total Applications

21

Equipment Grants

2

Player Clinic Grants

9

Financial Grants

\$106,555

Total Retail Revenue

348

Total Girls Impacted

323

Total Boys Impacted



It's an incredible feeling to be able to provide a meaningful opportunity for Arizona youth where they get the chance to build friendships, leadership skills and learn to compete. You help to make this possible. Thank you for being there for us, so that we can be there for the youth in our community!"

JAMES DIAZ

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