

Soccer tourney promotes peace

BY CANDICE RUUD

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For the sixth straight year, dozens of soccer players from across Long Island gathered at a Medford park for a little competition in the name of peace.

Twelve teams participated yesterday in Play for Peace — from high schoolers who grew up playing pickup games to college athletes looking to stay fit over summer break.

The players were diverse — men and women, some with Central American or Caribbean roots — reflecting the tournament's theme of uniting Patchogue in memory of Marcelo Lucero.

Lucero, an Ecuadorean immigrant, was stabbed to death near the village's train station in 2008. Seven teens were charged and convicted in the attack, prosecuted as a hate crime.

Suffolk Legis. Rob Calarco



The annual Play for Peace soccer tourney honors Marcelo Lucero. ■ Photos: newsday.com/medford

(D-Patchogue), who hosted the tournament at the Patchogue-Medford Youth Soccer League fields, said the slaying

was a tipping point for Patchogue. "Our community was a tinderbox a few years ago," he said. "But we've found a way

to be more inclusive and confront what we had going on."

Members of last year's Play for Peace champions said they

come for the high-intensity games, but also to be a part of something bigger.

Andrew Holder, 25, captain of the North Bellport Blasters, said the team is part of a larger church organization.

"This is a perfect avenue for us to come and demonstrate our character and get success on the soccer field," he said.

Calarco said the tournament costs about \$10,000 to put on, but they end up making more than that in sponsorships and donations. Whatever is left over is donated to the Patchogue-Medford Library, he said.

After playing three games in the midday sun yesterday, sweaty and exhausted players plopped down under a tent to eat lunch.

"That's the point of the tournament: to get all these people out to the field and sharing the time together," Calarco said.