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A TASTE OF LIFE  
IN NEW MEXICO

WE ARE UNITED



SANTA FE  
ALBUQUERQUE  
TAOS

MARCH 2020



# UNITED'S BIGGEST FAN

story by **CULLEN CURTISS**  
photos by **LIZ LOPEZ**



Peter Trevisani

When my New Mexican husband arrived at his Massachusetts college in 1981, his new buddies remarked on his excellent command of the English language, and thought he was wildly expectant for his first snow. Having grown up in New England, I have some old theories about why his new friends had nary a clue about New Mexico. However, I am more interested in exploring a recent revelation: Was it because, at that time, New Mexico did not have a professional sports team, an entity that naturally exports the state's identity and pride?

I wondered if that notion was on the mind of Peter Trevisani, CEO and founder of New Mexico United—our state's professional United Soccer League Championship team, now in its second year—after his successful 14-year stint at Thornburg Investment Management. Did he want to give New Mexicans the pro team they never had? A reason for kids from other parts of the country to know who we are? To put New Mexico on the map? After all, Trevisani hails from the Boston area, where he spent his childhood riding the train to see the Red Sox, the Celtics and the Bruins play, and venturing out to Foxborough for the Patriots. He does say, "When I left Boston at 25, it didn't matter where I was in the world. I could still talk about a game and bond through sports."

But his thoughts go deeper. On a snowy morning, we meet at United's headquarters in Albuquerque's Nob Hill. I'm delighted by the dynamic ground-level storefront, swathed in yellow and black Somos Unidos messages and Meow Wolf's technicolor, where one can buy season tickets and merchandise, catch up with players and coaches, and find Trevisani and his administrative team.

When I ask what he's reading, he says he's interested in human behavior, and expounds on *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* by Yuval Noah Harari. "We are generally thwarting the three things that have killed us over the centuries—famine, war, disease—so we can move things however we want going forward," he says. "How can we have a better life? That's what this team is trying to do."

United's mission sounds crucial in a state that, despite having a strong tri-cultural heritage, vibrant art communities, great air quality, resourceful land and the highest percentage of PhDs in the country, struggles to raise the bar in areas like poverty, child well-being, education and opportunity.

While honing his Clash of Clans skills at coffee shops between ventures, Trevisani identified a few crystallizing concepts that were integral to his next steps. He was drawn to building community and being a catalyst for others to recognize their potential, both of which he perfected after years running a 60-person team at Thornburg. He says, "I still get text messages from old teammates saying they miss our team. I love it, and I understand it. We were



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"No one believes in this state. But if we believe in ourselves, we can create something that is and feels important enough, something that is more than just about winning a soccer game, and people will come. And we can be wildly successful."

-Peter Trevisani



Pierce, Peter, Wendy, Luke and Blake Trevisani

growing individually and collectively. It was a lot of hard work. Within our group, we created our own culture."

So, you want to work with that feeling again, that feeling of being united? He nods, and shares his nascent thoughts: "I was frustrated with how upset people were, mostly around politics. They were becoming more divisive, disheartened. It was reducing positive outcomes for them and others, and I wanted to make a change."

At the outset, his solution to the malaise was, simply, to create something that allowed people to forget about their differences for 90 minutes, once a week. "Maybe someone who voted for red can sit next to someone voting blue and they can agree [on yellow and black] and when they leave," Trevisani says. "they can have a little more empathy and understanding for other people's views."

His good-finance-guy hat on, he built spreadsheets, buoyed by some local teams' history with decent fan bases—the New Mexico Chiles (3 to 4,000 average per game) and University of New Mexico Lobos basketball (more than 10,000 average per game)—but he was not impressed with the overall numbers: population two million, millennials migrating in favor of more opportunity, disposable income virtually non-existent. "In theory, you want the laptop and latte crowd—30-year-olds who don't have families and love experiences," he says. "But that's San Francisco, Austin, Los Angeles. That's not New Mexico. That's not Albuquerque. And it's certainly not the rural areas like Santa Rosa, Roswell, Taos."

Of course, we all know Trevisani decided to walk toward the numbers, rather than away. And that's because he saw opportunity—in the dearth. "No one believes in this state," he says. "But if we

believe in ourselves, we can create something that is and feels important enough, something that is more than just about winning a soccer game, and people will come. And we can be wildly successful."

Trevisani didn't pick soccer to be the unifier on a lark. According to The Fédération Internationale de Football Association, more than 250 million people with roots in more than 200 countries participate in soccer, making it the world's most popular sport. He describes being in London in his 20s, during the World Cup, watching a game on a small TV in a packed bar, wondering, how can this be bigger than the Superbowl? "What sucked me in was not the TV, but the singing, the chanting, the cheering, people putting their arms around each other," he says. "I wasn't from there, but I was one of them."

While Trevisani is emboldened that United led the USL Championship in attendance in its inaugural season, averaging 12,693 fans per game (average USL game attendance in 2019 was 4,832), he cautions that the only way to grow—to reach all two million New Mexicans—is a grassroots approach, made up of micro connections. It has to feel like family. "If there's one thing about New Mexicans," says Trevisani, who now self-identifies as one, "they can sniff out when you are not being authentic." With 100,000 unique visitors in 2019 (200,000 in repeats), Trevisani acknowledges he has a ways to go. "One person at a time. Our state still works like that. I love it."

Supporters are obviously vital, beyond selling merchandise and adopting corporate sponsorships, so United's internal credo—support the supporters—has real heart and, in turn, real results. Recent efforts include United's Holiday Tour in December 2019, in which players and staff visited 12 cities, including Grants, Truth or Consequences and Portales; and



Coach Troy Lesesne



17 schools, including Navajo Preparatory School, Hot Springs High School and Lindsey Steiner Elementary, to meet and play soccer with residents and students, and to donate needed supplies, like firewood, diapers, dog food. “We are the state’s team, and living up to that mission means visiting and truly becoming a part of communities throughout New Mexico,” Trevisani says. And with Community Corner partnerships, organizations like New Mexico Gas Company can step in to donate hundreds of tickets to individuals who might otherwise never have the disposable income to attend a United game. Television and radio broadcasts will soon be delivered in Spanish.

In return for New Mexico United’s heartfelt, contagious passion, supporters do not just come out to party at games. The Curse, the club’s supporter group, attended a recent Albuquerque City Hall meeting in defense of removing the netting at Rio Grande Credit Union Field at Isotopes Park during games, so that fans could feel more connected to the team. Trevisani remarked that these are people with families and lives, and things to do on a weekday night. “Most of the people were perfect strangers a year ago, and now they are sitting shoulder to shoulder,” he says. “First, fifth, 10<sup>th</sup> generation New Mexicans. One group drove down from north of Española. When I marveled at that, a supporter said, ‘That’s what you do for family.’”

And this family shows persistent signs of wanting to be together as often as possible. “We are starting to see sports tourism. People are traveling from three hours away,” Trevisani says. “They might go to the Zoo, go out to The Grove for lunch, stop in Santa Fe, stop in Socorro. Some camp, some stay in hotels. It gives everyone a chance to experience the city. It’s an engine that’s creating jobs.”

I ask Ryan Madden, Vice President of USL, for his thoughts about New Mexico United and for specific examples of communities that have seen positive economic development as a direct result of creating a USL team. He writes, “By every conceivable metric, the popularity of soccer in America is skyrocketing. But even by those standards, the success of New Mexico United has been unprecedented. What Peter Trevisani and his team have created is remarkable—they’re a true community club.”



Josh Lane

He adds, “Five years ago, Louisville City FC didn’t exist. Now, today, the club has two championships, one of the best fanbases in the league and this April they’ll open a brand-new, downtown, \$65 million, 11,700-seat soccer-specific stadium. Not only are they a tremendous source of pride locally, but there are also obvious economic benefits like jobs, tourism, infrastructure and development that come from that kind of success. Its benefits ring through the entire city.”

How about United after five years? All signs portend something positively meteoric with recent ingredients fueling the momentum: during the 2020 legislative session, Representative Javier Martinez and Senator Jacob Candelaria named Feb. 6 in the Club’s honor and were among others, including Representative Antonio “Moe” Maestas and Senator John Sapien showing broad support for a capital outlay request to fund the initial phase of an Albuquerque sports and cultural center with a soccer-specific stadium (\$4 million was approved; \$1 million will be derived from private team investors); innovative and unprecedented partnerships with Puma (gear), KraneShares and Meow Wolf (away and home jersey sponsors); the adoption of a USL League Two U23 team, readying potential coaches and United roster recruits; the growing High-Performance Program for ages 12–17; and association with a league that allows United to be on path toward competing globally, should they triumph at the U.S. Open Cup. Their first Open Cup contest is against Greenville Triumph SC, April 7.

“I just want New Mexico United to keep growing,” Trevisani says. “It may feel very established, but there are so many people who have not been to a game yet. And we want them to be there. This team is for them. My hope is that we have a team that we’re building for the next 100 years that we can point to as a symbol of our culture.”

Sounds like a plan for putting New Mexico on the map.

*To learn more, visit [newmexicoutd.com](http://newmexicoutd.com), and consider buying tickets for the first home match of the season—United vs. El Paso Locomotive, March 21.*



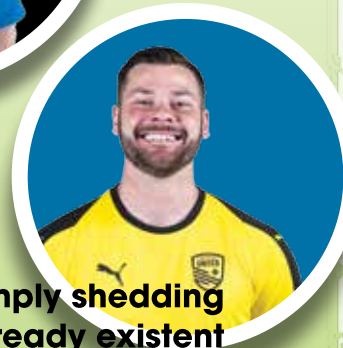


**"I want to be part of a family where we all have the same goals, the same passion to win the cup."**

AMANDO MORENO

**"I'm taking on the responsibility to represent this entire state. This fan base shows immense support for our club. If myself, and this team, puts in that same passion, hard work, and desire on the field, then we will be very successful."**

KALEN RYDEN



**"We're simply shedding light on an already existent passion and love that can only be expressed through the beautiful game."**

JUSTIN SCHMIDT



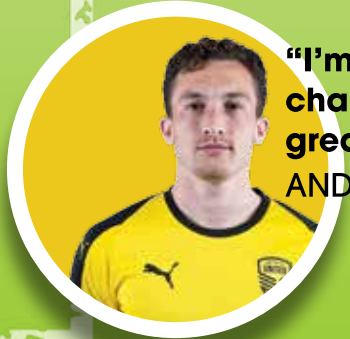
**"Whenever we're on the road we feel it's our responsibility to represent the state of New Mexico in the best way possible."**

AUSTIN YEARWOOD



**"I'm humbled to have the chance to play for such a great club and community."**

ANDREW TINARI



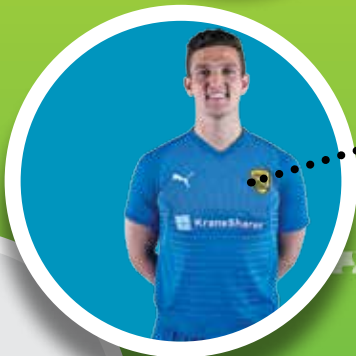
**"We're playing for something way bigger than sports; uniting a passionate community around a game that brings love and joy to one another."**

SAMMY SERGI



**"People have always told me that New Mexicans are born with a chip on their shoulder; New Mexicans and I have that in common—I wear my heart on my sleeve every single day in the black and yellow. I'm motivated to bring a trophy to my son's home state. ¡Somos Unidos!"**

CODY MIZELL



**"We are fighters, we are used to being the underdog and looked down on. But we are a prideful people. We love our home and we fight for it on the field."**

DEVON SANDOVAL



**"The unity within the United community is second to none. It is so impressive and such a humbling thing to be a part of."**

DAVID NAJEM

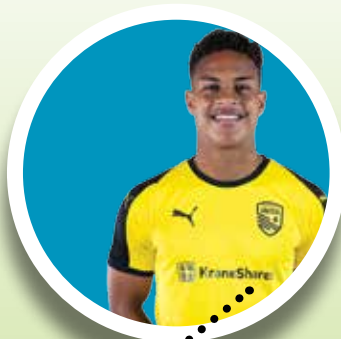


**"We are: hard work, diligence and humility."**

DANIEL BRUCE

“We are representing more than just ourselves. We want to make this state proud.”

BEN BEAURY



“It is an honor and a responsibility that I’m more than willing to carry anywhere.”

SAAIH MUHAMMAD



“Very excited and grateful! I hope I will amaze the fans, make them proud and win it all with the team this season.”

JORIS AHLINVI



“The culture that we’ve created is a reflection of the New Mexican spirit.”

SAM HAMILTON



“We are creating a sports culture that is inclusive and welcoming for everyone. New Mexicans are proud people and we want to reflect that passion and love they have for their home state in everything we do.”

DAVID ESTRADA

“New Mexico United is creating a winning culture that also values its people.”

RYAN WILLIAMS



“I am deeply honored and enthusiastic about joining this team. I am looking forward to a great season and meeting my new soccer family!”

ROMEO PARKES

“Every game we will be giving 110% for the black and yellow.”

PHILIPP BEIGL

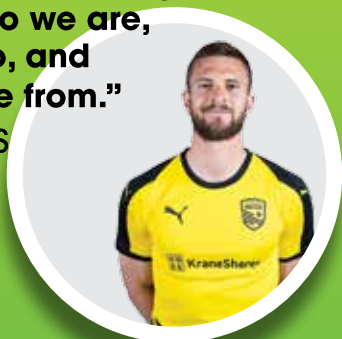


“New Mexico United is not just a sports team. We’re bringing New Mexicans together as one community to achieve a common goal through hard work.”

RASHID TETTEH

“We have unwavering pride in who we are, what we do, and where we’re from.”

JOSH SUGGS



“Everyone is being challenged to believe and dream bigger and greater than ever before. Soccer is an incredible force for unity, bringing a city and a state together with a vision.”

JUAN PABLO GUZMAN



“It is a huge responsibility, as well as a great honor to play in a state without any other professional teams. It is about time New Mexico gets recognized as a state that is full of talent and great people.”

MANNY PADILLA



“We take the approach that if we all believe in a collective goal, through hard work and dedication we can achieve anything we desire.”

CHRIS WEHAN