

A Personal Note from Bend FC's Executive Director

Most people know me as the Executive Director of Bend FC. What you may not know is that I was born and raised in Bend, and I have called Central Oregon home for most of my life. My wife and I raised our four children here, and I have dedicated nearly three decades of my professional life to youth sports and education in our community.

For 11 of those years, I worked in special education for the Bend-La Pine School District, including time spent at Silver Rail Elementary in the very Life Skills classroom where the tragedy occurred.

Silver Rail is not just another school in our community to me. It is a place where I worked, where I knew students and staff, and where I witnessed firsthand the incredible work that happens every day to support children with special needs.

What happened on October 15 was deeply personal, not only because I am a lifelong member of this community, but because I know and care about the people whose lives were forever changed that day.

One thing I know about the people of Bend, Oregon, is that when tragedy strikes and things seem dark, our Central Oregon community has a history of coming together. When darkness has tried to take over, we have found ways to create light together.

I would like to share a quote from a very wise man whose words have stayed with me since childhood:

“When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, ‘Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.’” — Fred Rogers

Nothing in my career has ever compared to the pride I felt in our Bend FC staff last week following the tragedy at Silver Rail Elementary.

The tragedy occurred on a Thursday. By midday Friday, our Bend FC administrative team had developed a plan for a weeklong day camp to support Bend-La Pine families who needed safe childcare and additional support while schools were closed.

That accomplishment alone was remarkable.

Bend FC is a community-serving 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization focused on soccer and soccer development. But at that moment, we knew we needed to be more than soccer.

Bend FC is deeply involved in our community through school-based programs, Special Olympics, recreational soccer, and competitive soccer. Although soccer is at the center of what we do, we knew that offering a soccer-specific camp would limit the number of children we could serve.

This moment called for something different.

We needed to create an environment where children could choose to participate in sports, explore arts and crafts, enjoy music, spend time with friends, or simply be kids in whatever way felt right to them. We needed a place where every child could find something they enjoyed, regardless of whether they played soccer or participated in organized sports at all.

More importantly, we needed to create an environment where children felt safe and parents felt comfortable dropping them off.

And we needed to do it fast.

These families had experienced something no family should ever have to experience. We understood that asking parents to entrust us with their children during such a difficult time required an extraordinary level of care, compassion, and preparation.

We needed to think beyond our normal safety procedures and consider security at a level we had never before experienced. We needed to prepare for emotions from children and adults that we could not fully anticipate. We needed to lead with compassion, extend grace, and recognize that every child and every family would process what had happened differently.

Over that first weekend, our Community Director, Camp Director, and Operations Director worked tirelessly to build something we had never attempted before.

We tried to think through the details people might never see. From feeding hundreds of children and providing first aid to organizing activities, coordinating volunteers, preparing for emergencies, and creating a welcoming environment, we worked to anticipate needs before families even walked through our gates.

They didn't simply organize a camp. They helped create a place where children could experience fun, connection, and moments of normalcy during a time that wasn't normal and should never have to be.

After decades in youth sports in Bend, I feel confident competing, developing athletes, and working toward championships. That is familiar ground for me.

Last week, however, asked something different of me. Of all of us.

And none of us were prepared for it.

But it reminded me that our greatest accomplishments aren't always measured in wins, championships, or goals scored. Sometimes, they are measured in how we show up for others when we are needed most.

I have never been prouder of our staff, our organization, or the work we do.

What It Took to Show Up

Here are just a few examples of what our staff, volunteers, and community partners accomplished in a matter of days.

We went from 30 campers to nearly 250.

Our normal camps typically serve between 30 and 40 players. We needed to prepare for nearly 250 registered campers that first Monday. Our staff adapted, organized, and made it happen.

Our coaches stepped far outside their usual roles.

Our highly trained soccer coaches became arts and crafts teachers, flag football coaches, cornhole instructors, wiffle ball pitchers, and so much more. They adapted to the needs of the children in front of them and did it with incredible energy and compassion.

We worked to make safety and security a priority.

We needed to check every camper in and out as efficiently as possible without compromising safety. Several Bend-La Pine technology department staff volunteered to assist with the check-in process and help throughout the day. Many campers were delighted to recognize familiar school technology staff members. That familiarity was another meaningful connection for our children.

Our first responders and community partners stepped up.

We wanted children to have opportunities to interact with first responders in a welcoming, positive environment. Staff from Bend Fire, Bend Police, and the Deschutes County Sheriff's Office stepped up to help make that possible, joining activities and sharing their time with our campers.

Westside Church Youth Ministry provided a fun cookie-decorating station and additional caring adults for children who wanted someone to talk with or spend time alongside.

Central Event Rentals donated a warm tent that gave campers a quiet place to take a break when they needed one. When the weather didn't cooperate, our staff even transformed that space into a movie theater.

And Lutheran Church K9 Companions traveled all the way from Spokane, Washington, with four golden retriever therapy dogs. They spent hours at camp over multiple days, offering comfort and connection to children and staff alike.

These were not simply donations or volunteer hours. They were people recognizing a need and asking how they could help.

We recognized that Silver Rail families needed something different.

On Wednesday, we transitioned to serving Silver Rail students and families exclusively. We knew this required a different level of care, flexibility, and compassion.

Our administrative team and staff met children and families with patience and kindness, adjusting to their needs and making room for whatever each day brought.

We couldn't undo what happened at Silver Rail or take away the pain our community experienced.

But we could show up.

We could create a safe place for children, give families a little breathing room, and provide opportunities for fun, connection, and normalcy during an incredibly difficult week.

And that is what our team set out to do.

More Than Soccer

Fred Rogers encouraged us to look for the helpers.

Last week, I had the privilege of working alongside them.

They were our staff, our coaches, our volunteers, our first responders, our school district partners, our community organizations, and so many others who stepped up when our community needed them most.

To everyone who contributed time, resources, encouragement, or support: thank you. You helped make something possible that none of us could have accomplished alone.

In nearly 30 years of working in youth sports and education, I have celebrated championships and helped young athletes achieve their dreams. I have experienced the excitement of winning and the pride that comes from watching children accomplish something they once thought impossible.

But I can say without hesitation that what our Bend FC staff accomplished last week means more to me than any championship we have ever won.

Because sometimes, the most important work we do has nothing to do with the scoreboard.

Sometimes, it is about creating a place where a child can laugh, play, make a friend, or simply enjoy being a kid for a little while.

Sometimes, it is about giving a family a little breathing room when they need it most.

And sometimes, it is about reminding one another that even when terrible things happen, we do not have to face them alone.

We are more than a soccer club. We are part of this community, and we have a responsibility to care for it.

Last week, our staff and partners reminded me what that responsibility looks like in action.

I am proud to be part of Bend FC. I am proud to call Central Oregon home. And I am deeply grateful to everyone who showed up for our children, our families, and one another.

One Club. One Community. We are Bend FC!

Special thanks to our volunteers:

Adam H.
Andrew R.
Brittany L.
Deby B.
Dominic D.
Don E.

Hannah B.
Heather P.
Isabelle
James T.
Jason H.
Jason S.
Joyce C.
Kasey H.
Kayla Z.
Kevin Q.
Liz F.
Mark H.
Max B.
Megan R.
Melissa C.
Mike J.
Monica S.
Nan C.
Payton B.
Randy S.
Regina E.
Robin S.
Samantha C.
Sarah D.
Scarlett K.
Sean C.
Sean T.
Starr T.
Stef E.
Westy M.

Special Thanks To Our Community Supporters:

Sylan Learning
Bend Fire & Rescue
Deschutes County Sheriff's Office
El Rancho Grande
Port of Subs
Old Towne Pizza
Pizza Mondo
Burgerville
Lutheran Church K9 Comfort Dogs
Central Event Rentals
Bend Park and Rec
Top Tier Handyman

Trader Joes
Bend La Pine Nutrition Services
All the families who donated snacks and drinks
Eberhards
Starbucks - 20&Robal (by Costco)
Next Athletes
Sunriver Brewery
Bend Police
Bend Fire
Burger Ville
Summit HS Boys Soccer
Mt. View HS Girls Soccer
COCC Club Soccer Players