

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



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March 30, 2026

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Stott, Pannell, Stover, Brozyna and Major Modarelli Lead April 1 Safety Conversation at Seton Hall; *The intersection of sport, safety and community readiness*

NEW JERSEY — As New Jersey prepares to host matches of the 2026 international soccer tournament, a high-level conversation on crowd behavior, security readiness and community coordination will take place **Wednesday, April 1**, at Seton Hall University's, with support from the Joseph A. Unanue Latino Institute.

Bringing together leaders across professional soccer, global event security, small business development and law enforcement, the ***Kicking It to 2026: Keeping the Peace Around the 2026 Game*** conversation focuses on one priority: ensuring the region is ready to safely welcome the world through strong partnerships across communities, businesses and institutions.

"The size and scope of the 2026 tournament will dwarf all previous editions. Whether measured by the number of participating teams, stadiums, host cities, or host countries, it will mark the first time an event of this magnitude has been attempted. With that massive undertaking comes enormous opportunity—and enormous risk. Event safety is, undoubtedly, the biggest risk," said
Erik Stover, CEO of the NY Cosmos.

Produced by Kicking It to 2026: The Countdown to the Game, the independent docuseries captures how communities, businesses and fans are preparing for this historic moment across North America.

"As the 2026 tournament approaches, supporting our small and medium-sized businesses is critical. Kicking It to 2026 brings our community together around safety, security and readiness," said **Kelly Brozyna, CEO of the New Jersey Small Business Development Center.**

Lori Tarke, DHSc, executive director of the Joseph A. Unanue Latino Institute, emphasized the university's role in convening the conversation and the cultural significance of the moment. "In the spirit of sport, unity and celebration, we are honored to bring our communities into this global moment."

With 48 nations, 16 host cities and three countries involved, the 2026 tournament will bring an unprecedented influx of visitors, placing new demands on infrastructure, public safety systems and local economies.

Keynote speaker Professor Clifford Stott, MBE, Ph.D., a global expert in crowd safety, will address misconceptions about crowd risk and share research-driven strategies focused on building legitimacy, trust and effective dialogue between public safety officials and communities.

Frank Pannell, Vice President of Security for the U.S. Soccer Federation and former U.S. Secret Service agent, will address national security planning and interagency coordination.

Major Christopher Modarelli, Commanding Officer - New Jersey State Police Field Operations, Deputy Incident Commander NYNJ World Cup 2026 will focus on operational readiness and cross-jurisdiction coordination, reinforcing that safety at this scale depends on shared responsibility.

“Moments like this underscore how essential community partnership is to safety, preparedness and shared responsibility as we look ahead to 2026,” said **Meiling Macias-Toro, executive producer of docuseries and Freedom Studios**.

“We’re proud to see the docuseries mission come to life in a community forum,” said **Giovanna Aguilar, director and executive producer of docuseries**.

The program will be **emceed and moderated by five-time Emmy Award-winning journalist Rafael Bello**.

Vereliz Santana, recently appointed by Governor Mikie Sherrill as Director of Advocacy, will be honored with the **Champion of Advocacy Award** during the VIP Meet and Greet ahead of the program.

Distinguished guests include **Dr. Jairo Borja**, Vice President of Corporate and Entrepreneurial Programs, representing the Statewide Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey.

During the VIP Meet and Greet, **Commissioner Germaine Ortiz** will address watch parties and Bergen County preparedness. **Consul Mariana Diaz of Mexico** is also among the invited guests.

A special soccer exhibit will be presented by **Hugo Almeida**, CEO of Abitronix.

The evening will conclude with a **special performance** by Argentinian American singer, actress and global human rights advocate **Sophia Angelica**, bringing a vibrant and unifying close to a program centered on safety, community and global connection.

EVENT DETAILS

Seton Hall University

Event Room, University Center

April 1, 2026

VIP Meet and Greet (invitation only): 4:00 PM

Doors open: 5:00 PM

Program begins: 5:45 PM

To secure your spot, [register today](https://events.shu.edu/event/47584-kicking-it-to-2026-with-clifford-stott) at <https://events.shu.edu/event/47584-kicking-it-to-2026-with-clifford-stott>.

Supporting Organizations: Seton Hall University's Joseph A. Unanue Latino Institute, the New Jersey Small Business Development Center, Prospanica, the Statewide Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey, Goya Foods and DailyPay.

About:

Kicking It to 2026: The Countdown to the Game is an independent storytelling docuseries highlighting the energy and anticipation of fans and communities preparing for the 2026 soccer tournament throughout Mexico, the United States and Canada. The project is not affiliated with FIFA or any official tournament organization. The docuseries is produced by Candesco Productions and Freedom Studios, Inc.

Candesco Productions is a boutique creative studio producing multimedia content and events focused on thought leadership, entrepreneurship and social impact.



Freedom Studios, Inc. develops and produces culturally rooted film, television and digital content that amplifies underrepresented voices. Through authentic storytelling, the company creates stories that connect communities across cultures and platforms.

