



Hello NW Volkssporters!

1. **Starting Point Book:** Compliments to Julie Heath for the winning photo used on the Starting Point book cover and Annette St Pierre and the CRVC club for hosting a great event in Terrebonne, OR.

2. **Kudos to Dennis.** Please note that your Deputy RD, Dennis Standridge, attended the AVA Board meeting this month in Tucson at his own expense for a firsthand look at the Board proceedings to better serve our region. Thanks Dennis for your dedication.

3. **VOP Deadlines:** If you participated in the Virtual Online Program (VOP) challenges—401K and Walk Across Italy last year, you have until the end of January to register for the 2019 challenges. Otherwise your data will be archived and you'll be starting all over. For just \$22 you can again participate in the fun Walk Across Canada and also help us with the Regional Challenge. There's a nice 2-foot-tall trophy for the region with the best average score. If you're in the Northwest, I want you on our team!

4. **Wanderer Paper Suspense:** The American Wanderer (TAW) suspense for the first quarter is 25<sup>th</sup> of January and the other suspenses are on the 25<sup>th</sup> of April, July and October. Plan accordingly.

5. **Quarterly/End of Year Reports.** Still quite a few participation reports to be filed (124 of 357). Club Treasurers and Presidents: please ensure your reports are in by end of month.

6. **Marketing Contract Award.** We have a very exciting opportunity and an urgent need to do something new to promote our sport! A marketing contract proposal of up to \$150,000 by the Publicity Committee with MassMedia of Las Vegas, NV, was moved forward by the Board to negotiation by the Executive Director (ED). Contract will be to promote our program with a focused national campaign using perhaps 10 clubs to amplify their events with marketing assistance. We anticipate the tools developed will be shared across AVA right away. The best chance of success is to limit the number of clubs our contractor will work with over the next two years to get it done right, then roll out across all clubs.

7. **Rebranding State Assns/Clubs.** If you have a state association or club with "Volkssport" in the title, please consider creating a better marketing name. Some clubs have already followed the national program by creating a dba (doing business as) name, such as my club in Vancouver—Vancouver USA Volkssporters dba Vancouver Walking Club. Doesn't change who we are, what we do or change our history, but does allow easier introduction to prospective walkers. This allows us to move Volkssporting further back into the conversation when describing our program to new walkers.

8. **AVA Financial Status.** Our 2018 audit was clean and our reserve capital is sufficient to support current operations for nearly four more years before drastic changes need to be implemented or new funding sources found. That is the window we have to work on reviving our program by growing more clubs and increasing participation across all our clubs. While a dire situation, your Board is working in unison to turn our program around.

9. **AVA Audit Extended.** Henry Rosales, AVA ED, presented a proposal to extend the audit to a two-year cycle, which is acceptable procedure. The Board approved, as it will save nearly \$10,000.

10. **Free Walker Study.** As you may know, Sam Korff conducted a year and a half AVA study of "free walkers" and reported his findings at this Board meeting. His recommendation was to put the issue to the

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membership at the convention for a vote whether to retain or eliminate it, rather than having the Board vote. This issue is and has been for years the most contentious issue in our program. Why? Because free walking is non-existent internationally and about three fourths of our AVA community has none or very limited use of free walking. More to the point, under our current billing procedures, AVA doesn't receive any revenue from clubs for those who walk for free. Without going through all the details of the study or the issue, I can tell you the Northwest reports approximately 51% of all AVA free walkers, or about 8,000 per year. An informal vote of the Board showed that a motion to eliminate free walking would pass and the consensus is that a vote by the membership would run about the same. However, after some discussion and presentation of other data about how our region contributes financially to the success of AVA, the Board voted to defer the vote and give us some time to work on reducing the extent of free walking, but not totally eliminate it. I believe it is a good recruiting tool to bring new walkers into the program, but we need to understand that from a standpoint of fairness, we need all participants in our sport to help fund the program, not just those who stamp books. The idea that our participation fee is paid for the stamp some walkers receive has long been an inaccurate representation of the fee, as most of the overhead expense is not about the stamping. While many non-credit walkers give donations at our walks, that donation money is not routinely shared in support of our national office. One point that was well received by the Board is that our Northwest clubs' generosity in the Big Give in recent years and toward the 401K challenge partially offsets that lack of shared revenue. What I'd like to do is engage in some dialogue through our state associations about setting goals for reducing free walking and educating all walkers on the need to help fund our national program, as well as our clubs. Even if all free walkers paid or clubs paid for them and we have good participation in the Big Give, we're still short over \$50k per year in our budget, but every bit helps.

11. **Losing Ground.** This past year nine clubs across AVA closed (none in northwest), one is processing paperwork to close and two new clubs were added. Not a new story, yet very disheartening. I want to express my appreciation and admiration to those in our region who are working hard to keep our struggling clubs going. I recognize it is not easy, but it makes a huge difference having state associations, neighboring clubs and dedicated members working together. Thanks to all who help the Northwest stay vibrant.

12. **Did You Know?** Your AVA IT Committee, in supporting upgrades to the sanction system, AVA website, finance software, AVA hardware, event stamp machine, and much more, has benefited from over \$117,000 in donated hours by software engineers! While many of the improvements are obvious, much is transparent, as they have worked to update old software, implement new accounting software, develop a new "MyAVA" portal, transfer the online start box to AVA's server, purchase and install new hardware, and so on. Many thanks for that generous support by Chris Zegelin, Mike Green, and several others, not to mention the day-to-day, diligent work by Hector.

13. **Big Give.** Last year northwest clubs contributed over \$5,400 to the Big Give, on top of the more the \$12,000 your regional representatives on the Board contributed toward the more than \$70,000 raised. This year we again have a matching goal of \$20k, and the Board is nearly there with a large match donation by one of our own plus GroupWorks has made a \$2,500 donation. I would like to suggest each club and state association look at the number of free walkers reported in 2018 and consider a donation approaching a dollar times that number.

14. **AVA Officer Candidates.** This summer we bid adieu to Sam Korff and Bob Morrison on the AVA Board. It appears Nancy Wittenberg will likely be on for 2 more years running unopposed for VP and Chase Davis from Olympia running unopposed for Treasurer.

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15. **Convention Voting.** Jerry Wilson from the North Central region has arranged the loan of an electronic voting system for the convention. A trial run at the latest Board meeting demonstrated that it will be simple to use and provides a speedier result.

16. **MeetUp.com Use.** If your club is using MeetUp.com, which is proving to be very successful, ask your club members who attend to also sign in via MeetUp. This shows a greater level of attendance and is more inviting to new walkers.

17. **2020 AVA Challenges.** Bonnie Johnson, in her final year managing the Special Programs Committee, presented three new challenges for approval: Celebrating American Flight, Mayflower 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Walks, and Rockin' Around the Clock. All three were approved and are going to be excellent challenges.

18. **AVA Awards.** The nominations for national level awards for the convention were presented by Suzi Glass from CA, reviewed by the Board members and voted on. Results will be revealed at the convention dinner. The Board considered a motion for a third regional award for Extraordinary Volunteer and decided to move it to a national level for the next convention. Regional Commendable and Meritorious Service certificates can be awarded at any time, but to be acknowledged in the convention brochure this year they need to be to me before March 1<sup>st</sup>.

19. **National Office Versus HQ.** For many members, the national staff in Texas has been viewed as the "Headquarters," but that is a mischaracterization of their function. They exist to support the membership, which is our clubs, and they rightfully should be viewed as our "National Office." A subtle shift in philosophy, but important to disabuse the notion of us versus them. Yes, they require information and payments from clubs, but that is so they can provide support to our club and state programs and act as our interface to the international association (IVV).

20. **Board Structural Changes.** To help the AVA Board remain focused on the strategic mission of growing our sport, we're looking at realigning the committees that deal with operational matters under the Executive Director. This will allow the Executive Committee to focus on high level tasks, while the ED will manage the day-to-day tasks.

21. **Achievement Book Processing.** Karen Winkle at AVA will accept and process event/distance books for all Volkssporters by mail or you can scan the entire book and email to her at [Karen@ava.org](mailto:Karen@ava.org). Front of books must be legibly filled out, all pages scanned and indicate if you desire pins/patches/certificates. Still working on procedure for updating your passport books, as that is your most important permanent record. More to follow.

22. **IVV Banner.** If your club needs to update your IVV banner Marian at AVA has the contact information for Tanja, the IVV point of contact. Here are their costs: The 400x150cm is 90 Euros, the 80x200cm is 75 Euros. I understand there may be a local source, but I'll have to investigate that and will share what I find out.

Happy Trails!

Tom Baltes, NW Regional Director, 505-298-1256, [TLBaltes@aol.com](mailto:TLBaltes@aol.com)