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From: "Nancy Wittenberg" newittenberg@gmail.com, our RD (or above)

1. Strategic Planning Update – David Bonewitz, Chair, Strategic Planning Committee

STRATEGIC PLANNING – YOU SPOKE, WE LISTENED

At the National Executive Council (NEC) meeting in Las Vegas (January 22-24, 2016), the Strategic Planning Committee presented three Courses of Action for the NEC's consideration. Unfortunately, the deadline for this article is December 25 which means this article can't report what happened at that meeting. However, by the time you read this, you should be able to read the NEC minutes on the AVA website.

While we can't report on the NEC meeting, we can explain a major element in the process of getting to the three Courses of Action, the surveys that the Strategic Planning Committee sent out for walkers and clubs to express their opinions on the state of AVA and where we need to be going. As stated before, we can't release the raw results of those surveys as we promised participants confidentiality in their responses. However, we will be releasing (via the AVA website) the summary data. This article will touch on some of the themes, issues, and comments that guided the Strategic Planning Committee in their pursuit of change to strengthen AVA for the future.

The intent of a "random" survey is to gather information from a subset of a population with the expectation that the results statistically represent the entire

population. The problem with surveys like those we conducted is that they are not truly “random” because the participants chose to participate (i.e., they were not randomly pulled from our population). So, this group of respondents (a motivated subset of our AVA participants) may not be totally typical of our AVA participants as a whole. In addition, the distribution of the survey could have been better as several clubs and Regions indicated that they pushed heavily for responses to the survey while others did not. In spite of these shortcomings, the number of responses (1727) to the individual survey means that the margin of error is around 2% for a 95% confidence level. So, if the survey were to be repeated 100 times, we’d get the same answers 95 times. For example, 70% of all the respondents reported their gender as female. With a margin of error of 2%, the true number of females in AVA is statistically estimated to be between 68 and 72% (70% plus or minus 2%).

While much information can be garnered from the numerical data from the surveys, much more insight can be obtained from the comments that participants made while doing the survey. The challenge is grouping and categorizing those comments in order to make use of the results. At this point, we need to recognize the Membership Subcommittee, and especially Jeanne Miller, for all the hard work developing and analyzing both the individual and club surveys.

From the Individual Survey, we find that our respondents were overwhelmingly retired (69%), female (70%), white (92%), and older than 55 (88%) with no children under 18 in the household (89%). While we credit the military connection for the beginnings and early growth of Volkssport in the United States, today only 37% of the respondents indicate that they have or have had any military connections. Numerically, the top four states for respondents were Florida, Washington, Maryland, and Texas. Whether this represents the percentage of population of walkers is unknown. A number of respondents expressed concern over the questions that dealt with demographics. These questions were seeking essential information about the target audience that is necessary when seeking grants, national publicity, or national partners or sponsors.

With regard to AVA membership, only 51% of the respondents are members of AVA. Given that percentage, it is probably no surprise, but still disappointing, that 65% have not attended an AVA Biennial Convention in the last 10 years.

From the demographic information, we analyzed the responses to the more substantive questions that deal in communications, technology, governance, and other issues that must be addressed when we look at the future of AVA.

When it comes to communications, 90% indicate that they prefer to receive information about events by e-mail. However, it became clear with the submission of the club survey that there are a number of clubs who do not either have access to, or choose to not access, the internet.

When it comes to embracing modern technology, every age group indicated that they are in favor to using a computer or a mobile app to register for events. Comments ranged from “I’d love a ‘Where’s the Start Box?’ app” to “Make sure every aspect of being a volkssporter is supported by digital means.” All but the oldest age group is in favor of being able to log and track achievements on-line with comments such as “If you can do your taxes online, AVA should be able to let its members do their transactions online.” Similarly, every age group is in favor of being able to download event maps. “I hate bothering shopkeepers for boxes and worrying about specific hours. I would much rather do everything online.” However, there were comments from individuals that encouraged AVA to not go so fast or so far that we abandon those who are not technologically savvy or forget the personal interaction that draws us together. “New people need fun face-to-face interaction at fun events to keep coming back.”

In response to the question of what changes would most improve AVA walks and/or events there were 28 pages of over 700 comments dealing with Events and Maps, Clubs, and Advertising and Publicity. There was much agreement that AVA and its clubs can do a better job of advertising, marketing, and publicity of events and Volkssporting itself. The next area of general agreement was that clubs need to be more welcoming, more entertaining, and provide a better product. The question then becomes what can AVA, as an association of very disparate clubs, do to help clubs make these improvements at the local level.

In response to the question of what should AVA stop doing, there were 17 pages with over 400 comments. One big topic is a perceived “us vs. them” mentality, referencing rules, bureaucracy, poor communications, and out-of-touch leadership. (“Change the relationship between clubs and the HQs from a mostly administrative, punitive fees-collecting perception to one of value-added partner.”) It was rather disturbing that there were some who declined to answer certain questions due to a fear of some form of retribution. (“No comment because of retaliation.”) All of this indicates a less than healthy environment. “I can’t think of a single way AVA supports our local club. WE support AVA with our fees.”

The second survey we conducted was one of clubs and State Associations. We sent out the survey to the registered point of contact for each club and State Association. We had 179 responses to the Club/State Association Survey which

is only a 74% return rate. This was a bit of a surprise and disappointment as we intended this survey to give us a better insight into the clubs that makeup AVA.

In answer to the question about how satisfied the club is with the governance performance of the AVA National Executive Council, 52% were very unsatisfied, unsatisfied, or neutral. In the comments, the respondents viewed the NEC as a “micro-managing” “good old boy institution” which does not represent the clubs, but employs “regional favoritism” and refuses to “embrace the 21st century.”

In response to the question as to how AVA can help your club with the challenge(s) it faces, the number one response was “publicity,” especially on a national level, either as advertising or as a partnership or sponsorship. Other comments focused on greater use of online technology to register for events and to record individual achievements. A few comments focused on the need for updated AVA literature, website, and how-to guides, such as how to train and retain club officers, create interesting events, use social media, or create a website. One requested that AVA develop or make available mapping software for events. Several comments dealt with some aspect of rules, bureaucracy, and fees or penalties that they felt held their club back. Our intent when the Strategic Planning Committee was formed was to ensure that we developed the strategic plan from the bottom up, not from the top down. Tremendous effort was put into the interpretation and use of the survey data to guide the committee’s recommendations to the NEC. Special thanks go out to all those who took their time to put their thoughts into these surveys. You spoke, we listened, and now with the decisions of the NEC, we will take action to build a strong American Volkssport Association for the future.

You are encouraged to review the minutes of the January NEC meeting on the AVA website to see what Course of Action the NEC approved. As you read this article, the SPC is developing the implementation details for the approved Course of Action. This Course of Action and its implementation details will be shared with the membership for your comment. Once complete, the detailed Strategic Plan will go back to the NEC for final revision and approval. On an on-going basis, your input continues to be valuable. Send your thoughts and ideas to your RD and/or to the Strategic Planning Committee at SPC4AVA@gmail.com.



President’s Corner: Joe Titone

It would be very helpful if someone new were to come forward to be AWW president when my term expires in June. You wouldn’t have to serve all 3 years -

we would even welcome a newcomer for one year. This has been my first time as an AVA club president and I found it much easier than expected. My main duty has been to run the monthly meeting. As you probably saw, I did things somewhat differently than my predecessor and you're certainly welcome to put your own mark on the office.

A few of my other duties are to answer a small volume of email from ESVA and AVA, answer a few questions about the club from the general public, and forward some AVA emails to the treasurer and secretary. All in all, it's a very easy job – not requiring a great amount of my time. Also anyone who comes forward, will have my support and the support of many others in the club.

You know I do the newsletter, but that job is separate from the president's. I intend to continue doing the newsletter for the foreseeable future unless someone else would like to try it.

So please come forward, and put your name in nomination for one, two or three years.

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Next Meeting: Feb 9 - ALL ARE WELCOME! Details and map are now at <http://www.allweatherwalkers.org/static.htm>

Sections that rarely change are also at this link: list of officers/valued associates, and Weekend Walking description.

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Club Events/Weekend/Wednesday Walk Calendar:

Frenchmans Bar, February 27
Half Marathon Walk Challenge with Vancouver USA Volkssporters, 4/23
Washougal Riverfront, June 25
Vancouver Murals Walk, Sept. 10

Group Walks: Wednesday Walks – 1000 am
<http://home.comcast.net/~titone7604/Wed/wed.htm>

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<p>Feb Birthdays: Breneman, Jan 2/9 Bowen, Earl 2/27</p>	<p>Achievements: please contact the editor with event and distance milestones</p> <p>Dan and Kim Baker 425 events Linda Barneson 575 James and Jean Ohl 600 Earl Bowen 1,100 Dick Baker 3,000 ----- Linda Barneson 6,000 KM James and Jean Ohl 6,500 Jan Breneman 13,000</p>
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Welcome to new members – Toni Timberman

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Jan Breneman's Corner: RAMBLING RIDDLE

I was walking down Mulberry Lane,
I met a man doing the same.
He tipped his hat and drew his cane,
And in this rhyme I said his name.
What was the man's name?
(Answer next month.)

Reprinted from Walker's Pocket Companion, Malcolm Tait, Pavilion Books, London UK, 2007, Page 95.

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