

December 29, 2020

Dear Sokol members and dear friends of Sokol Washington,

I would like to wish you a healthy and prosperous 2021. We are one year older and perhaps a little bit wiser. Another year is behind us. One day, when we get much, much older, and we look back into the past, the year of 2020 will stick out. In our memory, it will be the year during which our lives shifted. They changed in a way any of us could hardly have imagined in 2019. We might say to our grandchildren: "Before 2020 we could walk on the street and go to the store without wearing masks; when we unexpectedly bumped into our good friend, who we hadn't seen for a while, we would shake hands and exchange huge hugs. We could even give a kiss. But when COVID-19 landed on humanity in 2020, the norm of interacting among humans changed. New norms of gathering and interacting with each other were established. Instead of sitting in a classroom with fellow students, kids had to sit in front of the computer monitor, in their rooms. Their teachers and friends wouldn't be in the classroom either--they also sat at home, similarly, staring at their monitors. Everything one requires--desks, chairs, chalkboard--were replaced with Zoom or some other similar artificial online tool. The physical schools and gyms with ropes, mats and parallel bars were closed. We were not allowed to go to Sokol on Friday evenings to meet friends--friends who speak the same language. We were not allowed to have fun by running and exercising in the gym with our fellow young Sokols..."

I am sorry for this gloomy introduction. We Sokols, we are optimistic people by default. We can figure our way out of gloominess in any situation. We, our American Sokol Washington DC unit, have done just that this past year. We have adjusted to the new situation which COVID-19 brought on us. We came with new ideas and we changed the way we used to run our activities. We ended the Sokol school year 2019/20 (in May, June 2020) with online Zoom classes and with online Live-streaming exercises. We had to cancel our annual summer camp. In the fall of 2020, we organized our events the 'new way,' working with general requirements and protocols such as wearing masks and maintaining social distancing. We organized our annual LK bicycling trip, annual membership appreciation picnic, several hiking trips, and the outdoor movie night at Czech embassy. We successfully organized the 2nd annual 5K run (Beh republiky). On December 5th, instead of having our typical Mikulasska party (which is also one of our biggest fundraiser events), we organized The St. Nicholas Treasure Hunt, which took place in Lake Accotink Park in Springfield, VA. All these events took place outside, in parks or open spaces, in accordance with each county's COVID-19 requirements. A member of our board came up with the idea of organizing 'Challenges' for Sokols. For example, the one-month 30,000 steps challenge or the one-month 100k/100m walking/running challenge. These challenges, still happening, don't require much more than your commitment. Once you sign in, the challenge itself is pushing yourself to do what you have committed to do. That is at least my case. So instead of running one day a week, I run three or even four times a week. Instead of completing one or two hikes in a season, my daughters already pushed me to do two hikes in one week.

In September 2020, we also resumed our regular Friday weekly activities. We were able to do that only thanks to the Czech embassy, which invited us to use their embassy building for our Fridays Czech language school classes and preschool classes for the children from our Czech and Slovak communities. The school duration is the same as it used to be 6:45 pm-8 pm. After that, we use the additional 1 hour of our Friday activities for either folk classes, art classes, or yoga/meditation classes. Occasionally I come to observe those classes. It's a joy to see our children arrive at the Czech embassy and enthusiastically participate in a language school or yoga classes. I am so grateful that the Czech

embassy let us use their space and so glad that we have such wonderful staff (director, deputy director, teachers, instructors).

The Slovak embassy extended their help to us as well. They invited us to have our monthly meetings in their building.

I am very thankful to both the Czech and Slovak embassies, to the Czech and Slovak governments, to SVU, and to ASO for their financial and non-financial support of our organization.

I would like to extend my thanks and gratitude to all the volunteers who are helping our ASW organization flourish. Without their impressive ideas surrounding approaches to this COVID-19 year, and without their willingness to actively participate in this organization, we wouldn't have been able to provide as many activities during this challenging time.

To conclude, I would like to mention a Sanjay Gupta quote which I heard as part of his morning "helping you live a better life" WMLA radio advice: "Study after study are confirming benefits of volunteering work." I haven't read any of those studies; still, I believe that Sanjay Gupta's statement is correct and that volunteering work is beneficial to you. One of the benefits of volunteering work is its fight against loneliness. Another benefit is its help in fulfilling our human desire to belong to a group. This might apply to you whether you are in your twenties or in your fifties, whether you are single or married. Especially now, during the COVID-19 era, feelings of isolation and loneliness are high. So, if you are sitting in your basement, feeling that your life is passing by and you don't see the purpose of that life of yours, here is an idea: join us... You don't have to have direct Czech-Slovak roots (but if you have them, even better!). In any case, if you are thinking of doing some good for yourself and for the people around you and you don't know how to start, then go to our website [www.sokolwashington.org](http://www.sokolwashington.org), fill out our membership application, send it to our membership director and become part of our community. You can start by simply participating in our activities; if you see that there is any need for help with organizing our activities, step forward, we will appreciate you.

If you are a person who simply doesn't want to be a member of any organization but you still like what we do, you can take part in our anti-COVID-isolation remedy by donating to us any amount of money that fits you: \$5, \$10, \$20 is OK. Of course, we accept higher donations as well. Because of COVID we haven't been able to organize our biggest fund-risers (Mikulasska and Sibrinky). We (ASW board members) are volunteers; we do not get any money for our work, but we still need money to make activities for our Czech-Slovak community possible. Whether you are an ASW member or not,

you can go to our website [www.sokolwashington.org](http://www.sokolwashington.org) and on the right-upper corner, you will find the red 'Donate now' button. Click on it, fill in the desired amount, and complete the transaction. This way, you can support us and your Czech-Slovak community, regardless of whether you have direct roots in our two beautiful countries.

Thank you! I wish you a happy, healthy, and relaxed 2021. May it be free of stress and full of love and fun.

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