

## **Happy Wanderers Club History Report – 2020**

*by John McClellan, President*

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic that struck this year, the Happy Wanderers rebounded and managed to continue to offer safe, enjoyable events in 2020, our 29<sup>th</sup> year of operation as a member club of the American Volkssport Association (AVA) – *America’s Walking Club!*

The calendar year opened with 79 membership renewals after an ending membership of 132 in 2019. Retention was between 60-65%, as some members returned later in the spring/summer after lapsing. Our high turnover is due in large measure to the nature of the *MeetUp.com* audience - who tend to join but then lapse after one year. Reasons cited for not returning included: our time schedule not being conducive, and some members who re-located out of the area. Most of those not returning gave no specific reason, and follow-ups were made throughout the spring.

We started our normal schedule of Wednesday night “fun walks” (now ACE-WG) at Halifax Marina in Daytona Beach and our first Sunday group walk of club year-round trails was in Flagler Beach. Also with the start of 2020, the club put our first event, (Savannah, GA) onto the AVA’s now expanded “online start box” or OSB. Our long-time Savannah POC, John Sewell, has our gratitude for many years maintaining a physical walk box there. All registrations, download of directions and IVV credit (via printed insert card) are now done from online.

On 9 January we held the first General Membership meeting of the year. Club opening funds balance was \$4,119.98 and other normal business was conducted. In December (2019), the club had been contacted by *Tater Tours* about visiting several of our YREs in Florida in early 2020. They would visit 6 of our walks (St. Augustine, Flagler Beach, Ormond Beach, Daytona Beach, New Smyrna Beach and Blue Spring State Park) between 20-23 January with almost a full bus of 48, bringing the club an early revenue bump of ~300 paid walkers. On Saturday 25 January, the club visited Blue Spring State Park for our annual group walk there during the Manatee Festival. Our Blue Spring YRE is now a Seasonal Event (SE) and open only from 1 January to 31 March.

The club Executive Council held their first meeting on 6 February and filed its annual report with *SunBiz* (State of FL) online. Sign-ups for a club bus trip to Charleston, SC from 1-3 May, continued. With the hosting responsibilities for WAF30 in Daytona Beach this year, planning started with visits to local hotels on A1A – the clear choice was the posh *Plaza Resort & Spa*, with the best group rate option, amenities and meeting spaces. (As a note – very few hotels in the search area had a meeting room at all.) On 8 February, we held our first traditional event of 2020: a guided bike ride on the rail trail from Titusville, FL – our 2d time using this trail. Once again, some club members traveled to San Antonio, TX for the first official “Texas Trail Round-up” under the International Marching League (IML) banner.

On 1 March the club hosted 75 extra walkers at our Port Orange YRE for the city’s “Get Fit” program – our 2d year supporting the event. The event includes a special 1-mile walk option (first day of program) along with the regular 5k and 10k. At the March General Membership meeting, the club was back at 104 members. The club also discussed the

Charleston bus trip, club donation to the AVA Big Give annual fundraiser, and continued discounts from Office Depot. Proposed walk routes for WAF30 included the Smyrna Dunes, Central Park in Ormond Beach, and One Daytona with the racetrack and perhaps a piece of Embry Riddle Aeronautical University. The Plaza Hotel contract was signed and will include 40 blocked rooms and a banquet dinner for 80. The 7 March event in Palatka for Ravine Gardens and the Azalea Festival was cancelled due to the start-up of road construction in the Gardens, dating to Hurricane Michael in 2016.

Though un-related, this early cancelation foreshadowed the growing concern with the COVID-19 pandemic, now spreading in the United States. By 11 March health concerns at the Wednesday night fun walk (Bike Week) led to the club avoiding the downtown, and on 15 March the club visited St. Augustine – our last walk for the next 10 weeks, as the state of Florida instituted a “lock-down” of business and recreational activity that lasted through May. The club canceled our annual baseball game (as the Tortugas’ schedule was cancelled) and postponed the May bus trip to Charleston to at least 2021. The AVA event in Memphis, TN, National Walking Week 1—7 April and IVV World Walking Day in May were all off. WAF30 remained an open question at this point. Access to some YRE boxes was cut-off immediately, but some were gathered up by club POCs before the businesses were locked. Once the pandemic restrictions eased, some of these events were run from officer’s homes, on a limited basis.

The April Board meeting was held via e-mail, as guidance for COVID measures from AVA started to emerge – all traditional events had been postponed by AVA, but measures for year-round participation in states allowing outdoor activity were drafted. The club continued limited walk development for WAF30. Around this time, the sad news arrived concerning the passing of Marvin Stokes, former club co-President, AVA Regional Director and Vice President. Sheila McClellan collected comments from club members e-mails and social media and put them in a sympathy card that we sent to Tina Stokes. A suggestion to “dedicate” WAF30 to Marvin’s memory was made. Our May General Membership meeting was cancelled.

By 5 June, the state of Florida had moved to “phase 2 re-opening” and outdoor activities were being encouraged - with CDC recommendations such as hand sanitizing, masking and social distancing of 6’ between people. The club re-started our Sunday/Wednesday schedule on 31 May at New Smyrna Beach, but we stayed away from holding any traditional events (except a bike ride) for the remainder of 2020. In June, Summer “ice cream” walks started again on Wednesday nights at 7 p.m. and continued through August. The club continued to refine their processes throughout – encouraging walkers to bring their own water (instead of our cooler) and even their own pen for signing-in. AVA guidelines provided a set of “best practices” and even an online video for clubs to adapt to this new pandemic reality.

With the 4<sup>th</sup> of July approaching, the WAF30 committee (Happy Wanderers, Mid-Florida Milers and Suncoast Sandpipers) made the difficult decision to postpone WAF30. Unknown chances for success – or even pulling off the weekend in the light of a winter ‘surge’ predicted and no vaccines, made it the right call. The Plaza hotel agreed to keep our contract and 2020 rates in-place for 1 year until November 2021.

Membership stood at 110 for our short General Membership meeting on 2 July, moved to VFW 3282's large banquet room. AVA cloth facemasks were now available, and our 2d group bike ride for 12 Sep at Lake Beresford, was tentatively approved. The 2021 Planning meeting – normally held the first Saturday in August – was postponed. The August Board meeting was held in person, outdoors. Club leaders discussed our “re-opening” and our assessment of our COVID-19 adaptations at events since then, and renewal of existing YRE/SE sanctions for 2021.

At the September General Membership meeting the club stood at 114 members, and the reminder was made that any new members starting 1 OCT were given all of 2021 as well. 10 riders attended our second guided bike ride of the year on Saturday 12 September at Lake Beresford on the Spring-to-Spring rail trail. At the October Board meeting, the President reported on the AVA Big Give fundraiser – which raised just over \$100,000 (the goal was \$80,000) despite the ongoing pandemic. Our #Opt Outside walk on Friday, 27 November would be held at Smyrna Dunes - with 6k or 8k from Grace K. Barck park and back. Discussion also included our annual Holiday Food Drive, the club Christmas Party, and upcoming events in early 2021.

As we moved towards winter, the twice weekly walk schedule held with moderate participation. Wednesday walkers during the pandemic were averaging ~21 to 23 a month. Very few members reported contracting COVID, though Florida numbers were growing steadily. At the November General Membership meeting, membership was reported as 126. Dan also reminded all the upcoming Holiday Food Drive which will begin on 25 November and end 16 December. The annual Veterans Day group walk was cancelled when a late-season tropical storm on the west coast of Florida pushed threatening weather too close by to take chances.

Amidst the ongoing pandemic, the club decided not to hold its annual Christmas Party for the first time in many years. While the New Year's Eve afternoon “fun walk” was held, our regular dinner afterwards was also cancelled. We ended the year with club membership of 129, *down only* -3 from 2019. Participants for all YRE were 1,634 (plus a small number of “free” walkers) but TE were only 18 from the two bike rides, for an overall total of 1,652 – UP by 267 from 2019. Most of the increase came from the early year Tater Tours visit. Swim event participation was also improved by the pandemic, with the swim YRE “paying for itself” for the first time since started. Club closing funds balance for 2020 was \$4,758.83.

After a difficult and challenging 29<sup>th</sup> year, the Happy Wanderers are looking forward to an end to COVID-19 and continued success in 2021.

### **Attachments:**

- 1 – 2020 Walk #s
- 2 – 2020 Financial Summary (*separate file*)
- 3 – 2020 Membership Roster (*separate file*)

2020 Happy Wanderer Event Participant #s:

Traditional Events

- 8 Enterprise – Bike; 2/8
- 10 Beresford – Bike; 9/12

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- 18 No TE walks. Ave. Bike = 9

Year-Round Events \* *includes Tater Tours bus visit*

- \*88 Blue Springs SP (SE 581)
  - 118 Cocoa Beach (YR 634)
  - \*147 Daytona Beach (YR 1134)
  - 78 DeLand (YR 440)
  - \*137 Flagler Beach (YR 1904)
  - 46 Hontoon Island SP (YR 549)
  - 90 Mt. Dora (YR 726)
  - \*161 New Smyrna Beach (YR 1129)
  - \*131 Ormond Beach (YR 977)
  - 79 Palm Coast (YR 1885)
  - 12 Palm Coast *Bike* (YR 1874)
  - 87 Ponce Inlet (YR 725)
  - 154 Port Orange (YR 1132) *high – w/Get Fit +75*
  - 12 Port Orange *Bike* (1853)
  - 63 Port Orange *Swim* (YR 1351)
  - \*163 St. Augustine (YR1128)
  - 50 Sanford (YR 1510)
  - 25 Savannah, GA (YR 1366) [OSB] *very low*
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1,634 participants; Ave. per Walk: 124 ; Bike: 12; Swim: 63

**Total Participation: 1,652**