

Why do we have new stamps?

The new stamps have arrived and I want to take this opportunity to tell you about the reason why they were created. There seems to be a mindless focus on costs in the various emails that have circulated around. The real reason has nothing to do with the cost of producing and handling the stamps. Any focus or discussion of costs misses the point completely.

I also created the Online Start Box (OSB). I had a career identifying problems then defining and implementing a solution to the problem. The OSB is working on the problem of supporting events that are a long way from a club's home base, and subsequently, are dropped by the club. As we loose clubs, areas of the country loose their walks. Mississippi is an example where there are now no clubs, but we are able to offer events there using the OSB. There simply would be no other reasonable way to do this. Participation in mail-in schemes is woeful due to the time lag and the commitment of having someone manage it on a daily basis.

Having the OSB has started a trend where events are created specifically because they are viable on the OSB. This increases the number of opportunities for people to participate, but also creates a way that a new club can be formed around existing walks that were first supported on the OSB. The new club does not need to start from "scratch". We are also seeing old favorites being re-introduced because it is now possible to do this quickly and easily with a reasonable level of commitment from the point of contact (POC).

The new stamps have a similar story. I was walking with my club in the San Jose Fourth of July parade. It is simply fun to be part of the parade. A guy dashed over and said "The Striders... It's great to see you are still active, I used to be a member". In the 60 seconds that I got to talk with him, he told me why he dropped out. "I used to keep books, but stopped because the stamps were no longer interesting to me". Think about that for a moment. The stamps are what drives much of the revenue to the clubs and to the AVA. They are what supports Volkssporting. The walking was still interesting but the stamps were not.

This is not a new story to me. I am the President of a small but active club. I meet a lot of people, but how many ex Volkssporters do you meet? Very few, and too many have had a similar story about their books. The most telling was "I never wrote the place in the books, so after a while I couldn't remember where I got the stamp". Their books were full of meaningless numbers that did not trigger any memories. How do you explain the value of the program when the stamps do not help build any excitement. "You went there?" "How was the walk?" Can you look at your books, and remember?

How many ex Volkssporters are there? How many hundreds of thousands of dollars of revenue has been lost to our sport because the stamps were no longer meaningful to an active Volkssporter. How much should the AVA invest to staunch this problem? I can assure you that it is at least 10 to 20 times what was actually spent.

We as an organization need to think outside the box and begin to collectively understand the larger nature of the problems we face. This is why the strategic plan is so important as a first step. It helps channel the efforts into initiatives that have a big impact. So now you have the real, the important, story as to why the new stamps are worth all of the effort.

Working the problem...

This is the sort of problem that I love to tackle. It is complex because there are many requirements that must still be met. It has to be something that we can actually do, and there has to be a meaningful improvement in what we were doing previously. It is very pleasing when a reasonable solution is available.

The slugs were expensive; about \$2.80 sourced from China, for '2017' for about 2000 slugs. This is why we changed to just '17'. So imagine the cost of fully custom stamps for every event made the same way. The lead time was about 6 weeks, so forget about custom stamps for traditional events not planned 3 months in advance.

The cost of the new stamps was a complete non-issue and simply a by-product of understanding how we could make them while maintaining control over the flow. For those that need to know, they are less than the cost

of a '2017' slug, and about the cost of just the '17' slug. This is everything including the amortized cost of the laser cutter and Hector's time to actually make them. This will fall to about \$1 when clubs start to reuse handles.

The new stamp design has several trade offs. There are not cut very deep so that we can have finer detail in the stamp. This detail is required by the characters that describe the location of the event. If you cut too deep, the edges of the rubber crumble over time and definition is lost. Chunks of rubber can literally break off. Look at one of your old stamps and you can see the deterioration. The construction of the new stamp should withstand several thousand impressions, and remember that we will be replacing the rubber and foam every year because of the "year".

The shallow cut in the rubber can allow dried ink to accumulate in the narrow detail in the stamp. This will blur the stamp. The stamp may need a periodic wipe with a wet tissue or wet wipe to remove any excess ink. Similarly, too much wet ink on the stamp will not help and stamping on anything but a flat hard surface can be messy. My grandchildren figured this out with their art stamps, you can too. This is a very small price to pay for a very big impact on our sport.

I hope that you enjoy these new stamps as much as I have while working on them. If you have any ideas for viable improvements, please let me know. If you have any comments, you can email me at IT@ava.org

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