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SOKOL



TIMES

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Sokol USA celebrates 130 years of heritage, fitness and patriotism as America approaches its 250th anniversary

As the United States prepares to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the founding of our nation in 2026, one proud American organization with deep immigrant roots is also marking a historic milestone of its own. The 130th anniversary of the founding of the Slovak Gymnastic Union Sokol of the United States of America, better

known today as Sokol USA.

Founded on July 4, 1896, Sokol USA was established by Slovak immigrants who came to America seeking freedom, opportunity, and a better life for their families. Inspired by the ideals of physical fitness, moral character, education, democracy, and patriotism, the organization quickly became an important center

of community life for generations of Slovak Americans.

The founders deliberately chose Independence Day as the organization's birth date, a powerful symbol of their gratitude to the United States and their belief in the principles of liberty and self-government. That spirit remains alive today as Sokol USA proudly celebrates both

its own legacy and America's semi quincennial.

For 130 years, Sokol USA has promoted physical fitness, youth activities, cultural preservation, education, and civic engagement. Local lodges throughout the country became gathering places where immigrants learned English, celebrated their

traditions, organized athletic events, and strengthened their connection to their new homeland while honoring their Slovak heritage.

Throughout its history, members of Sokol USA answered the call to service during times of war and national need. Generations of Sokols served honorably in the armed forces of the (Continued on Page 6)

From the President's View

The sun has finally appeared and warm weather has finally arrived in Pittsburgh after a long and dreary winter! Everything became green almost overnight and a new energy is in the air! I recently saw some of this energy at the recent MCT District in Leechburg, Pa. All of the district's Sokol lodges were well represented. The district packed more than 50 boxes for the GBU Birthday Bash project. There was great interest and excitement among the lodge leaders present for the meeting. They had a great time packing the boxes which were donated by the district to a local food bank.

I also saw a lot of enthusiasm at the MCT meeting for the upcoming 5K Fun Walk which will come at the Memorial Day weekend to mark the Pittsburgh Agreement which led to the formation of independent country of Czechoslovakia at the end of the First World War in 1918. Several lodges were planning lodge get togethers which will incorporate the 5K walk. The Fun Walk can be



Joseph Bielecki

done by all members as it is self-paced and on the honor system with the individual members reporting that they participated.

In early June, Brother Damian Malecki, President of the World Sokol Federation as well as President of Sokol Poland, will visit the USA and Canada. One of his stops will be in Pittsburgh where he will visit the Sokol sports displays at the Pittsburgh Regional History center and meet with Sokols from both Sokol USA and from the (Continued on Page 2)

Sokol Stroll



Sokol lodges around the world participated in the recent 5K Fun Walk. It was an opportunity to celebrate Sokol and its ideals. See more photos on Page 5.

SOKOL TIMES

official organ of the
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OF THE USA

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SOKOL USA

A Division of **GBU** FINANCIAL LIFE



WEDNESDAY, JUNE 23 - SUNDAY, JUNE 27, 2027

SLET PERFORMANCE SATURDAY, JUNE 26, 2027

From the President's View

GBU Financial Life

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SOKOL FARRELL ACCEPTING DONATIONS FOR SCHOLARSHIPS

Sokol Farrell is accepting donations to the Scholarship Fund. Well over \$40,000 has been awarded to our Sokol Farrell members. Donations may be sent to: Sister Dorothy Slezak, Chairwoman; 6850 Seneca Road; Sharpsville, PA 16150. Checks may be made to Sokol USA Farrell.

Please refer to the Sokol Farrell website at <http://www.sokolfarrell.org/> for applications and instructions.

(Continued from Page 1)
Polish Falcons. Sokol USA looks forward to hosting him during his time in Pittsburgh. It is the first visit by a World Sokol Federation to the United States in many years.

The bright sunny summer weather is a perfect time for our membership to get out, get fit and get active! The summer is the perfect opportunity to go walking, biking, golfing and participating in more traditional Sokol sports. It is also a great time for our lodges to meet and engage in fraternal activities. These can be anything from community clean up events, lodge picnics, golf tournaments and other events. These are excellent ways to share fraternalism and to stay fit. Fitness promotes the Sokol virtues of a sound mind in a sound body.

Community involvement and fraternal events build bonds among our lodge members.

Also, I encourage our eligible members to apply for Sokol USA's Milan Getting Scholarship as well as for GBU scholarships. If

an applicant is selected, these scholarships are useful for defraying the cost of post-secondary education expenses.

Additionally, I urge our lodges to celebrate on July 4th. It is the 250th anniversary of the independence of our country. It also marks the 130th anniversary of the founding of Sokol USA! This is a phenomenal anniversary of our Sokol presence in America. I urge our lodges to consider holding fraternal events through the end of this anniversary year to celebrate this important anniversary!

Finally, I wanted to share with the readers the news of the passing of our long-time member, John West. John

and his late wife, Justine, who predeceased him two years earlier, were a devoted Sokol couple. Justine had been a Sokol USA National Board member for many years. Both of them served as long-time officers of the Braddock, Pa., lodge and the Sokol USA MCT District. They attended almost every SokolFest since the 1990s and volunteered for many Sokol events.

In conclusion, I encourage our members to meet, to engage in physical activity, and to embark on sports and fraternal activities through their local Sokol USA lodges.

Nazdar!

Brother Joseph Bielecki
President
Sokol USA

SPONSOR A GYMNAST

Are you interested in sponsoring a gymnast and getting updates on how the sponsored gymnast is progressing?

Reach out to Kristin Greenberg at kgreenberg.sokolusa@gmail.com to find out how you can become a part of this sponsorship program.



MEDAL WINNERS – The weekend was filled with exciting accomplishments for the athletes of Sokol USA Chicago at the American Sokol Central District Competition! Our Bronze Level team proudly brought home a First Place Team Trophy, while seven additional gymnasts earned individual all-around medals for their outstanding performances. Every gymnast who competed also earned event ribbons, showcasing the hard work, dedication, and perseverance demonstrated throughout the competition season. We could not be prouder of these athletes and all they accomplished together that weekend!

Falcon Spotlight – Sokol Farrell: Joanna Totin

At Sokol Farrell, one young member has quickly become known for her positive attitude, endless energy, and kind heart. Joanna Totin, an up-and-coming Sokol member, has spent the last two years making a lasting impression on coaches, teammates, and families alike.

Although Joanna has only been involved with Sokol for two years, her dedication to movement and performance began long before that. She has been dancing for eight years, developing strong discipline, confidence, and creativity that shine through in everything she does. Whether she is practicing in the gym or performing in front of a crowd, Joanna brings enthusiasm and determination to every activity she participates in.

Outside of athletics, Joanna is also an excellent student who takes pride in earning good grades. She enjoys spending her free time with animals and expressing her creativity through arts and crafts. Her caring personality extends beyond the gym and classroom as well. As a big sister, Joanna is known for being

responsible, supportive, and compassionate, always willing to help others and lead by example.

Joanna's commitment to Sokol was proudly displayed when she participated in the XXV American Sokol Slet held in Chicago in June 2025. Participating in such a special event allowed Joanna to represent her organization while celebrating the traditions, teamwork, and spirit that Sokol promotes.

In the gym, Joanna has become known as a true ball of energy. Her positivity is contagious, and she consistently encourages those around her with her kindness and respectful attitude. Coaches and fellow members appreciate the excitement and dedication she brings to every class and event.

As Joanna continues to grow both inside and outside of Sokol, there is no doubt that she has a bright future ahead. Sokol Farrell is proud to have such a hardworking and caring young member representing the organization.



Joanna Totin



ARTISTIC GYMNASTICS COMPETITION – On May 16, 2026, 11 gymnasts from Sokol USA Chicago proudly participated in the American Sokol Central District Competition in artistic gymnastics. In addition to their individual accomplishments, Sokol USA Chicago was represented by a Bronze Level team made up of four talented 6- to 7-year-old gymnasts. We are incredibly proud of all the athletes for their hard work, determination, and sportsmanship throughout the season. A heartfelt thank you goes out to the parents and coaches whose support made this event possible, and to the American Sokol Central District for hosting another successful Central District Competition and Sokol Day Picnic.



REBECCA WICHNER EARNS FRANKIE KAJARI AWARD

At the recent annual Exhibition, Rebecca Wichner was honored with the prestigious Frankie Kajari Achievement Award, a recognition presented to individuals who embody dedication, resilience, leadership, and a strong love for the Sokol community. Named in memory of Frankie Kajari, a beloved member of the Sokol program in the early 1990s who courageously battled leukemia while remaining a positive and active presence in the organization, the award celebrates those who carry forward his spirit and commitment.

Rebecca was selected for this honor because of her years of dedication and continued leadership within Sokol USA Chicago. Having been part of the program since the age of 3, she has grown from an enthusiastic young participant into a dependable leader and role model for younger gymnasts. Rebecca consistently volunteers her time to support multiple classes each week, steps in wherever help is needed, and approaches every challenge with positivity and determination.

This past summer, Rebecca attended her first American Sokol Gymnastics Instructor School, where she expanded her skills in coaching, spotting, and leadership. Her initiative, strong work ethic, and willingness to support others have made a lasting impact on the program and the community around her. Congratulations to Rebecca Wichner on this truly well-deserved recognition!



Rebecca Wichner

Sokol 5K Fun Walk



DONATIONS GRATEFULLY APPRECIATED

To the Milan Getting Scholarship Fund

From Sokol USA Headquarters \$50.00
*In Memory of Arlene Von Schwedler (Lodge 39-40W)
 & Mother of Debbie Golden, Vice President*

From Sokol USA Lodge 164, Detroit, Mich. \$212.50
In Memory of Deceased Members

From Sokol USA Lodge 258, Campbell, Ohio \$63.75
In Memory of Deceased Members

From Sokol USA Lodge 30, Danbury, Conn. \$300.00
In Memory of Deceased Members

To the Sports, Fitness and Wellness Department

From Sokol USA Headquarters \$50.00
*In Memory of Arlene Von Schwedler (Lodge 39-40W)
 & Mother of Debbie Golden, Vice President*

From Sokol USA Lodge 164, Detroit, Mich. \$212.50
In Memory of Deceased Members

From Sokol USA Lodge 258, Campbell, Ohio \$63.75
In Memory of Deceased Members

From Sokol USA District Nitra \$8.50
In Memory of Deceased Members

From Sokol USA District Pavel Mudron \$85.00
In Memory of Deceased Members

LODGE 2 ANNOUNCES SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Lodge 2, Bridgeport, Conn., Sokol USA District, GBU Financial Life, has continued its scholarship program for high school graduates, it was announced by Lodge President Miguel Alicea. "In 2025, we awarded a high school student from Stratford High School with a \$1,000 scholarship award. This year, we will offer up to two \$1,000 scholarships to high school seniors accepted for admission to an accredited four-year college/university who are Slovak or Carpatho-Russian descent and residents of Bridgeport, Stratford, Trumbull, Shelton or Milford, Connecticut," he said.

"Criteria to be used in judging are overall merits of applicants, cumulative grade average, community activities, college acceptance, financial need and essay content," he continued.

"The essay content," said Lodge Secretary John Kamenitsky, "is somewhat unique. Rather than the usual 'why do I want this award,' we are asking the applicants to discuss the history, culture or traditions of Slovak or Carpatho-Russian heritage or stories about their ancestors in Slovakia."

"We hope to encourage the applicants to study the history, customs and traditions of their forefathers in Slovakia," he concluded.

SOKOL WEBSITE UPDATE

Sokol USA is redesigning our website! The new design will be a user-friendly comprehensive site to better fit the needs of our lodges and Sokol USA. We are looking for high resolution images of your lodge members and functions. Please include the lodge name and names of individuals in the photos. Images can be emailed to SOKOL USA National Fraternal Secretary John Kennedy at kennedy1073@gmail.com.

Sokol USA Celebrates 130 Years

(Continued from Page 1)
 United States, supported veterans' causes, and contributed to their local communities through volunteerism and charitable work.

Today, Sokol USA continues to evolve while remaining rooted in the principles established by its founders more than a century ago: "A Sound Mind in a Sound Body." The organization remains committed to preserving Slovak culture and traditions while encouraging community involvement, patriotism, and family values for future generations.

The coincidence of Sokol USA's 130th Anniversary with America's 250th Anniversary offers a unique opportunity to reflect on the vital role immigrant organizations played in building the United States. Organizations like Sokol USA helped countless new Americans embrace the freedoms and responsibilities of citizenship while strengthening the cultural fabric of the nation. As celebrations are held across the country during this historic year, members of Sokol USA take pride in honoring the sacrifices and determination of their

founders, whose vision created an organization that has endured for 13 decades.

From its founding in 1896 to today, Sokol USA remains a living testament to faith, freedom, family, physical fitness, and patriotism. The values that continue to define both the organization and the American spirit.

As America celebrates 250 years of independence, Sokol USA proudly celebrates 130 years of dedicated service to its members, communities, and the nation it has always proudly called home.

DID YOU KNOW YOU HAVE ALL THIS?

GBU Financial Life Member Benefits

Member Magazine. *The Reporter* magazine provides members with bimonthly news about GBU's programs, national and local activities, product information and GBU's financial statistics.

College Scholarships and Grants. Academic achievement scholarship and grant awards are provided to qualifying college/post-secondary students. Four college scholarship programs are offered: freshman, undergraduate, graduate and two-year.

The GBU High School Freshman Grant program is designed to assist eighth-grade GBU members with associated costs in their transition into the high school curriculum.

S.N.A.P. (Safety, Nutrition, Awareness Program):

Prescription Drug Discounts. Members can register to receive, free of charge, the ScriptSave® membership card which provides discounts for their family and pets' prescription drug needs at over 62,000 pharmacies nationwide.

Fingerprint Kit Program. Members can protect their loved ones with an easy-to-use, "inkless" fingerprint ID kit. The ID kits can be purchased for a nominal fee.

Driver's Safety Course. Upon completion of this valuable refresher course, members receive a 50% reimbursement of the classroom or online course fee from GBU.

Sports Safety Program. GBU offers high-quality child and adult bicycle/multi-sport helmets at a very minimal cost to GBU members.

Health/Nutrition Awareness. Through *The Reporter*, GBU provides members with advice and tips on general health, nutrition and well-being.

Personal Safety Wristband. Durable, soft vinyl wristband adjusts to the wrist and provides space to write an emergency contact number in case wearer becomes lost or is unable to communicate.

Magnetic Medic Take Note Pouch. Holds medical note cards for up to four people in one household. Assists in an emergency situation to get appropriate care.

Hertz Car Rental Discounts. GBU members receive, free of charge, a special GBU Hertz membership card which entitles members to receive car rental discounts.

MediAlert® Benefit. GBU members receive a 20% discount on any MediAlert® product, excluding 14k gold.

Newborn Child Benefit. GBU member parent(s) are provided with a "no-cost" \$1,000 death benefit for their newborn child from days 15-60 following birth. Within that period, a \$5,000 guaranteed-issue policy is available.

Annuity Nursing Home Rider. After the first year, GBU will waive the withdrawal charge on a partial withdrawal in an amount equal to 20% of the fund value on the date of withdrawal. Other qualifications apply.

Orphan Benefit. This benefit provides financial support to junior members who have lost both their parents. At least one parent must have been a GBU member for at least two (2) months.

Life Line Screening. Members receive discounted pricing on preventative health screenings that use ultrasound technology.

Make a Difference One Member at a Time. New GBU member applicants are given the opportunity to select a charitable organization to which GBU will donate funds.

Make a Difference One Hour at a Time. In support of a GBU member's individual volunteer work, GBU will provide a donation to the member's qualifying charitable organization.

Fraternal Library of helpful family information. This library of family-oriented books provides members with a selection of "family-oriented" material at a minimal cost.

Get Fit Clubs. GBU keeps track of your walking, running and biking mileage. Awards are provided at specified mileage levels.

Language Learning. GBU reimburses members up to \$250 annually for taking an approved language course.

American Hearing Benefits™. Provides access to free hearing consultations and significant discounts on hearing aids.

Membership Contests. Members of all ages have the opportunity to win CASH awards through contests held throughout the year. Contests include photography, puzzles and coloring.

Social and community activities. Opportunities to participate in district-sponsored activities, such as bus trips, dinners, dances, picnics, fundraising events and local charitable volunteer efforts.

Springing into Summer 2026

It's been a very busy time for our members as we move from Spring into Summer. Our National Board met for our semi-annual Spring meeting in New Jersey on March 27th and 28th with more plans being finalized for the upcoming 2027 Convention and Sokolfest in Michigan. District MCT held their annual meeting on April 26th at our Lodge 255 in Leechburg. Prior to the start of the meeting, members built 50 Birthday Bash Kits to be given to four separate organizations in the Pittsburgh area. Lodges from Lodge 68, Blairsville and our hosts at Leechburg donated the ingredients and baking pans for these kits.

Sokol USA will serve as the host for the initial Worldwide 5K Sokol Fun Walk. The walk was adopted by the World Sokol Federation. This walk will be based off the walk we usually have during our Slet. In a date change, it will take place on May 30th and 31st in commemoration of the May 31, 1918, signing of the Pittsburgh Agreement when the independence of Czechoslovakia was declared from the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Lodges in Farrell and Chicago are finishing their Spring Sessions in May and early June. Chicago joined in the Central District Meet on May 16th and held a Sokol Day Picnic the following day. Farrell held their annual meeting June 7th with a student exhibition. Their 17th annual golf scramble will be held at Shenango Lake Golf Club on June 13th. This is a four-person event with a 9 a.m. shotgun start time.

Leechburg Lodge continues their schedule with a meal that was provided to local veterans after the town's Memorial Day Parade. Their annual golf outing this year was held June 6th and benefited the Leechburg Library. Palmerton Lodge will have a golf outing this Summer at a later date. In the meantime, they'll continue with many in-house events for their members. Bethlehem Lodge is again hosting a "Get Out of Your Booth" event in



MCT members at the Leechburg Birthday Bash

June. This sold-out event follows last year's equally well attended one.

Our Danbury Lodge joined the VFW Posts of Brookefield and New Milford for a day of service cleanup at the Gallow Hills Cemetery. Members marched in the Memorial Day Parade, followed by a picnic at the lodge. On June 19th and 20th, they are holding a clothing drive and on July 4th, they will join celebrations of the 250th Anniversary of American Independence and Commemoration of the 130th Anniversary of Sokol USA with a club picnic and fireworks. Their 7th Annual Golf Tournament will be held at Richter Park Golf Course on July 15th.

Finally, Sokol USA will host Brother Damian Malecki, President of the World Sokol Federation and Sokol Poland, from June 6th – 11th. A June 7th visit to Pittsburgh Regional History Museum which features Sokol sports displays and the signed original Pittsburgh Agreement is planned. Both Sokol USA members and the Polish Falcons will be able to meet President Malecki at this time. This is the first visit of the World Sokol Federation president to the USA prior to the Covid Pandemic, so let's all join together to make it a memorable celebration. NAZDAR Sister Nancy Hughes-Shurina Chair of Fraternal Activities

START YOUR FITNESS GOALS WITHOUT STARTING WITH PAIN

Gyms and fitness centers are full of enthusiastic people ready to transform their health, but pushing too hard, too fast often leads to strain and derailed goals. Your body needs time to adapt to new demands, especially if you've been less active.

Common mistakes include doing too much volume too soon, skipping warm-ups, ignoring proper form and pushing through pain instead of recognizing warning signals.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- June 13th – Farrell Golf Scramble
- June 19th & 20th – Danbury Clothing Drive
- July 4th – Danbury Club Picnic and Fireworks
- July 15th – Danbury Golf Tournament

SOKOLS AT THE WORLD'S FAIR

Do any fellow Sokols have pictures or memories from "Sokol Day" at the 1964-65 World's Fair in Queens, N.Y.? If so, the New York Hall of Science in Corona, N.Y., would love to have them! Sokol USA's own Sister Ellen Kovac was there and performed. The Hall of Science has a picture of her, would love to have more and, in general, learn more about our organization's participation.

If you like, you can send Brandi Kovac your written memories, anecdotes, or pictures at: BKKovac@aol.com and she will forward them to the museum. Or, if you'd like to communicate with them directly, here's their request:

Did you attend the 1964-65 World's Fair - or know someone who did? If so, we'd love to hear from you! We are eager to share photos, videos, and other memories from the fair so that we can look back and dream forward together! If you have something to share, send a note to info@nysci.org with the subject line "World's Fair Memories." Thank you in advance!

QUESTIONS ABOUT SOKOL USA?

Have any official Sokol business and/or questions?

Reach out to Brother John Kennedy at info@sokolusa.org.



PUTTING ON A SHOW – On April 11, 2026, Sokol USA Chicago proudly hosted its annual Exhibition celebrating the hard work and dedication of nearly 40 participants of all ages. The event showcased a variety of gymnastics performances, special numbers, and calisthenics from the tots' class through the adult women's class. Highlights included the tots' parachute performance, the boys' class special number to the Mario Kart theme song, the Tuesday girls' routine inspired by the "Cars" movie franchise, the Thursday girls' warm-up number, and the women's class performance of an excerpt from the Juniors Calisthenics written by Gail Wallach in 1989. We are incredibly proud of the effort, teamwork, and enthusiasm everyone brought to the event, and it was wonderful to see their hard work shine on exhibition day.

