



Westerners '20-'21 / "A New Hiking Season"

by

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Westerners Trail Boss, 2020-21

"To hike or not to hike?" That is the question! Indeed, that is the first of many questions for the Westerners as they look forward to their sixtieth year as Sedona's premiere hiking club.

And just as Westerners members plan and scout every one of more than two hundred hikes each year, Westerners board officers and hike leaders already are well into the development of the September-May 2020-21 season. Yet this season seems so different with COVID-19 counts in Yavapai County on the rise... will we be hiking?

I'm sure that we will be hiking, I know that I've run in to some of you on the trail, or seen your hiking reports via Social Media. In some cases, hiking has been with your spouse, in others, small groups of close friends, and for some, in typical Westerner sized groups with many friends who first met as Westerners.

So then the next question is, will we, as Westerners, be hiking as always – five or six days each week, in groups, at carefully calibrated skill levels, on dramatically different trails, throughout the Verde Valley and beyond?

The 2019-20 Westerners season ended abruptly, the final months cancelled due to COVID-19. But only a few weeks passed before new leaders were elected for '20-'21 and they, in turn, recruited members to plan and lead the

hikes. When, however, on June 8, the new Westerners board members met, they were not applying *finishing* touches to the new season; they were asking new *starting* questions:

- Come September, what will be the status of COVID-19?
- Will the Westerners be able to hike ... at all?
- If so, what modifications may be required to satisfy safety requirements – group size ... car-pooling ... masks ... social distancing?
- What further refinements will be required or recommended to meet not only the legal requirements, but to reach *best practices* for health and safety?
- And even if we resume our *hiking*, will we also be able to enjoy our traditional picnics and monthly meetings with guest speakers?

As the board considered such questions, consensus quickly built around two indisputable propositions: 1) each question led to several others; and 2) each question defied easy answers.

Why? While we have our boots, packs, and hiking poles ... while we bring our unbridled enthusiasm ... while we relish our wonderful Westerners friends ... and while we enjoy what may be the world's most spectacular setting ..., we can't find what we now need most: a crystal ball. We just don't know what COVID-19 will bring in the coming months.

We do know this. The Westerners board is asking these questions, knowing that prospective members, old and new, are eager for answers. And to help find them, the board voted unanimously to create a committee, chaired by former Trail Boss Dr. Curt Kommer, to identify our options and recommend the best possible answers.

So, to all veteran Westerners looking forward to another super season ... and to all newcomers anxiously awaiting their first year on our trails, please know that

we are as eager as you ... and that we're doing everything possible to be up and running ... well, hiking ... in September.

Yes, we're all in this together, with uncertainties like never before. Thank you for your understanding and patience. Check www.sedonawesterens.org for more information as we plan what we plan to be the start of a great season.