The enriching community Sokol has built through its various programs has always been something that I have loved. Ever since I joined Sokol Minnesota gymnastics seven years ago, this sense of belonging and encouragement has shadowed me in every venture, and one of my primary goals is to pass this support along to younger gymnasts.

One of the most meaningful aspects of being a coach for the last five years is getting to see kids you have instructed as timid kindergarteners continue to strive in this program as they grow into strong, confident teenagers. One gymnast who comes to mind in particular is a girl who I coached when she was in our youngest age group, then middle, and now she competes alongside me and my fellow coaches. Throughout the years, her abilities and dedication have increased tenfold from when she struggled to complete a pullover on low bar to easily flying into a front tuck. Another similar experience is watching a student perform his new skill – a roundoff back handspring - while remembering how I taught him to do his first cartwheel. The actual skills are not the most important; rather it is the beaming smile that follows that makes all the difference. This is the best part: knowing that you are making a positive impact. These moments of pride and joy are priceless, and they could not be possible without being involved in Sokol.

Even as I prepare to leave for college, I know that my experiences at Sokol will keep forming me into a better, more responsible individual, and I could not be more grateful for that. Being someone with Czech heritage, Sokol’s focus on cultural elements, like folk dancing and language learning, has taught me a lot about my own background, which is amazing.

Whether it is through the satisfaction of landing a back tuck or enjoying a fresh koláče at the Craft and Flea Market, my participation in Sokol has been an integral segment of my life, and I look forward to continuing to contribute to this program during college and beyond.