



ONE ON ONE WITH MS. ALBENA PETKOVA

I was standing near the kitchen of the Seniors Club volunteer office. She came out of the kitchen and smiled at me. I have never seen her before. Somehow, I took the courage and asked, “Are you our new Managing Director”? She shook my hand and said, “Albena Petkova”. After introducing myself as a member of the Seniors Club, I suggested that we meet for a “One on One” to get to know each other. She instantly agreed. I gave her my email address. She emailed me about her availabilities, and on one Thursday, we sat in the orange room downstairs and shared our backgrounds, personal traits, and, most importantly, the future of DDO Seniors Club.

After the conversation, I felt assured that our club was in good hands. Albena started the discussion by asking me how long I had been with the Club. I introduced myself by saying, “My name is Prithu Mukhopadhyay. I joined the club in the autumn of 2022. Mainly, I come to the club to play table tennis and write profiles of club members in the newsletter.” After the short introduction, the conversation took off. Read on.

Prithu Mukhopadhyay: You are our club’s Managing Director. May I have your business card?

Albena Petkova: I do not have a business card yet. I have to make one (she laughs).

Okay, I know your name and your position title. Tell me more about yourself or your background briefly.

I was born in Bulgaria, a small town named Stara Zagora, about 200 km from Sofia, the capital. Education-wise, I have a Bachelor's diploma in French literature from the University of Sofia and a bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of Montpellier in France. We came to Montreal in the middle of winter in January 2007.

That must have been an experience. Did you come to Dollard directly from Bulgaria with your family?

I came with my husband. When we arrived, we lived in Cote-des-Neiges for a year. He plays rugby with the Barbarians in Westwood Park. We used to come to Dollard, fell in love with the city, and moved to the West Island. My two daughters, 12 and 15 years old, were born here. Both are now in high school.

Fantastic! I have heard that you have lots of experience in fundraising. Now, I am keen to know about your professional life.

Well, I started my career here with the Montreal Economic Institute, a not-for-profit organization, as a Public Affairs Assistant organizing events. In 2009, I moved to work as Administrative



Coordinator at Lachine Hospital Foundation. It was a bit of traveling from the West Island to Lachine. So, I joined the Terrasa Dellar Palliative Care Residence. This is Canada's largest independent palliative care entity, and it was a rewarding experience. I saw life up and close. Compassion become part of my life.

It seems you have always worked for not-for-profit organizations.

That is correct. My professional journey has always been for not-for-profit organizations. I worked for West Island Community Share as Manager of communication and fundraising. Before joining the Dollard's Seniors Club, I was with the Arthritis Society of Canada as Manager of major gifts and planned giving.

You've lost me. It seems you moved around quite a bit. Let me ask you frankly – what motivated you to join the Seniors Club?

I have been constantly fundraising in every job, especially at Arthritis Society Canada, where I had to work nationally, collaborating with colleagues from across Canada. I have always wanted to get involved in the community and make a difference. While fundraising is an essential component of non-profit and charitable work, what motivates me here is the direct community impact and the actual delivery of programs that benefit our members and the community at large. When I saw this opportunity in DDO, I could not pass it up and applied.

I can understand. For the same reason, I am involved in different community organizations on the West Island. Now that you are with us, can you tell me what your every day at the office looks like?

Well, every day is different. It starts with a coffee and greeting members near the kitchen where I met you. Then I go upstairs to my office. I look after the daily operations, work with the board and different committee members, and plan for the club's 25th anniversary. Let's not forget I am only two months into my work. So, you could say I am mostly in learning mode.

Fair enough; how would you like to make an impact on the club? I mean your vision for the club.

First and foremost, I am very impressed with the club's activities and existence for the past 25 years. I like to raise awareness of the club, shine a light on it, and develop partnerships with other community organizations (community outreach) to offer other resources to our members.

Although you have only been with us for two months, you might have noticed the club's challenges. Can you talk about challenges, if any?

Certainly, in my brief time here, I have had the opportunity to observe and identify some of the challenges our club faces. While we are immensely grateful for the support we receive from our



city, it's evident that there are areas where additional resources could greatly benefit our seniors and enhance the services we provide. I would like to work on securing additional funding to unlock new possibilities for our seniors.

In this digital age, everything is becoming paperless. However, our seniors grew up without computers. That's a challenge, too. How would you like to address the knowledge gap?

I am aware of the issue. We like to keep the paper alive for our senior members. Program, newsletter, and others will remain on paper. Communication is the key. Also, we will have some computer-related teaching programs for interested members.

That's certainly good news for the members. Let's shift the gear to some lighter stuff. Are you ready?

Sure.

Are you a morning person or a night owl?

Morning person. I go to bed early.

Any guilty pleasure you like to share?

Anything sweet. I can start my meal with dessert.

Maybe that's why you always smile. How about your cooking skills? How do you spend your free time?

No cooking, but I must cook to feed my family—usually, I make Bulgarian cuisine, close to Greek food. I indulge in yoga, boxing, spinning, and biking in my free time. However, I did not bike for some time.

Where will you travel if someone gives you a free air ticket?

I will take my daughters to Bulgaria. All my personal decisions are revolved around my family.

That's admirable. Do you have any hidden talent that no one yet knows about?

I have no talent. I was terrible at singing and painting during my school days. I would say I am a good listener. Of course, if you consider that as a talent.



Most of us lack the ability to listen. You have an enviable talent. Possibly, after reading about you, seniors might want to meet with you. How can they meet you?

Morning coffee time is the best for now. However, I plan to be in the volunteer's office once a week to meet and hear out our members.

You must have expectations from the seniors as well. What these could be?

Open communication and honest feedback. After all, it is their club.

Okay. What do you want the seniors to know about you? Intelligent, practical, kind or...

I am always here for them. My team and I are here to make their experience better.

Last question, if I may, what is the best piece of advice you would give to the club members?

I firmly believe that our club members are a valuable source of wisdom and guidance for me in my role. As the saying goes, "I am not young enough to know everything," which resonates deeply with me. It speaks to the idea that with age comes experience and a greater capacity for learning and growth. I am convinced that our members, with their life experience and insights, have much to offer in terms of advice and perspective. I embrace the opportunity to learn from each of you.

Thank you so much for your generous time. We covered a wide range of topics. Indeed, it was a pleasure meeting you. Welcome to our Seniors Club family. Our members will appreciate your open, honest, and caring attitude.

Dr. Prithu Mukhopadhyay is an author, scientist, and wellness speaker. On February 29, 2024, he interviewed Ms. Albena Petkova.