



### CO-PRESIDENTS' MESSAGE

As the days grow shorter and the end of 2025 approaches, it is an appropriate time to reflect on our club's achievements and events of the past year and look forward to 2026. We'd like to begin by sharing a recent inspirational message from the FFI board chair, Donna Simek, that affirms the mission of Friendship Force

*In a world that sometimes feels more divided than united, our mission—to promote world peace and understanding by creating an environment where friendships can be established across the barriers that separate people —has never been more important. We are living in times of political tension. But we must remember: our work is not political. It is personal. It is human. It is about meeting face to face, heart to heart, and building understanding where it may not have existed before.*

*Let's be clear—Friendship Force does not exist to take sides in any conflict. We exist to bring people together in spite of conflict. Political challenges may arise. Borders may grow tense. But those are precisely the moments when our work is most vital. As we continue this work, we carry with us the legacy of our organization's founder, Wayne Smith, and our long-time supporter, President Jimmy Carter. They believed deeply in the power of citizen diplomacy — that individuals, not just governments, could bring peace and build bridges across cultural and political divides. Their vision still guides us today.*

*Now is the time to lean into our mission—to continue opening our homes, sharing our lives, and extending our hands in friendship. This is how understanding grows. This is how peace begins.*

To strengthen its mission and its future, the Friendship Force International board recently announced a new initiative, "**Membership for All**," to steer the organization toward a more secure future. The initiative is an effort to stabilize and grow FFI by strengthening recruitment, expanding hosting opportunities, and reducing dependence on travel revenue as the way to fund core operations. Starting in January 2026, FFI will roll out a new dues model that does not overburden clubs in low GDP countries. More details on this initiative will follow.

We hope you enjoy Thanksgiving and will join us for our club's holiday party on Sunday, January 4, 2026, at Buck & Honeys in Monona.

Happy Thanksgiving!!

Diane and Larry



### Club Activities Calendar

**BOARD meets VIRTUALLY the second Thursday of the month at 4:00 PM**

November 6	Dining on the 6 <sup>th</sup>	p.4
November 10	<b>Deadline</b> Early Bird Registration Special FFI North American Regional Conference, Memphis, TN	p.2
November 17	Book Club (Zoom)	p.4
November 19	Second Harvest 12:30-3:30 PM	p.5
December 6 or 7	Birmingham Journey Program	p.3
<b>2026</b>		
January 4	Holiday Party	p. 2 & 7
April 24-27	North American Regional Conference Memphis, TN	p.2
Mid-May	Sacramento, CA Outbound Journey	
July 14-21	Wairarapa, NZ Inbound Journey	
September	Lower Columbia, Inbound Journey	
Late September	Seferehisar, Türkiye Outbound Journey	



Remember to check Wisconsin-Madison website (ffwis.org) for any additions, updates or corrections to event schedules during the month, and keep an eye out for email updates as well. We don't want you to miss anything!

# Friendship Force International NEWS



## Conference Opportunity

### Memphis, Tennessee – April 2026

To encourage participation in the 2026 FFI North American Conference to be held at The Hyatt Centric Hotel on Beale Street in Memphis TN from April 24-27, the FFWM Board of

**\*NEWS FLASH\* Registration is now open!**  
**Early Bird Special -Register by November 10th for just \$280, regular price is \$320**

Directors will provide financial assistance to five club members who attend and who are willing to assume leadership roles in the Madison club.

The conference registration fee plus some funds to partially cover hotel/transportation expenses (up to \$400 in total) will be provided to Madison club members who are or will become actively engaged by coordinating club journeys, leading a club committee or activity, or assuming other club leadership positions. Funded members who attend the conference are also expected to make a report about what they learned at the conference to the board.

If you are interested, please contact the club vice-president, Kathy Johnson, by email: [Kjohnson44@ameritech.net](mailto:Kjohnson44@ameritech.net)

For registration and more information about the North American. Conference, see the FFI conference website: [https://www.eventleaf.com/e/ffiNA26?utm\\_source=Klaviyo&utm\\_medium=campaign&kx=IcvGYXWfDaBRp2j4-HhOiDSL0TceW1GJ9MFYupn0K7A.RaH2Qb](https://www.eventleaf.com/e/ffiNA26?utm_source=Klaviyo&utm_medium=campaign&kx=IcvGYXWfDaBRp2j4-HhOiDSL0TceW1GJ9MFYupn0K7A.RaH2Qb)

**Promoting global understanding across  
the barriers that separate people**



## FFW-Madison 2026 Holiday Party

Sunday, January 4, 2026

Buck's and Honey - Monona

1:00-4:00 PM

RSVP Form found on last page of Newsletter

## Invite a Guest to Our Holiday Party

Club members are encouraged to invite friends and acquaintances to join the fun of our holiday party, learn more about Friendship Force, and perhaps become club members. As an incentive, this year the board is offering a slightly reduced price for the members' guests. We look forward to seeing you and celebrating the new year at Buck & Honey's in Monona on Sunday January 4.



## JOURNEY NEWS

### Journey Manager's Update

We appreciate all members who so far have expressed interest in participating in the outbound and inbound journeys scheduled for 2026.

Once journey coordinators have been appointed for the outbound trips to Sacramento and Seferihisar, Türkiye, an invitation for applications will be sent to the membership. Türkiye is tentatively planned for the final weeks of September 2026. Sacramento is expected to take place in mid-May 2026.

The inbound journey from Wairarapa, New Zealand is confirmed for July 14–21, 2026. At present, the Wairarapa club has recruited eight Ambassadors and continues its efforts to expand this group.

Journey Managers are actively working to finalize dates in late August or early September for the inbound visit from Lower Columbia, Washington..

If you wish to volunteer as an outbound or inbound journey coordinator or would like your name added to the list of interested ambassadors, please contact Journey Managers, Kathy at [kspeckemeny@gmail.com](mailto:kspeckemeny@gmail.com) or 608-557-4885, and Tom at [tfmillerphoto@sbcglobal.net](mailto:tfmillerphoto@sbcglobal.net) or 608-334-3327. Your participation is crucial to ensuring successful and memorable journeys.

## Venue with kitchen area needed for December Birmingham Journey Program

The Birmingham Ambassadors are looking forward to providing an informative interesting program complete with a culinary experience on either Saturday or Sunday, December 6 or 7. If you could help us locate a venue with a kitchen area (25 to 30 capacity) please email Pat Watson ([cc2ss@yahoo.com](mailto:cc2ss@yahoo.com)) or Vicki Warren. Please save these dates and watch for a Mail Chimp with more details. We're looking forward to sharing our journey with you!



**Birmingham, AL viewed from Vulcan Park**

### The Birmingham Journey: Friends, Food, and Learning

Planes, trains, and automobiles brought thirteen Madison Friendship Force members to Birmingham, Alabama on October 19, 2025. The Birmingham Friendship Force Club welcomed us with a traditional southern meal and genuine hospitality. In the next few days, we learned about the development of the city of Birmingham with visits to the Vulcan, a symbol of the once prominent iron and steel industry. At its industrial peak, there were 73 theatres in Birmingham. We visited the three remaining: Alabama, Lyric, and Carver. We were treated to a performance of a Wurlitzer theatre pipe organ with all its sound effects at the Alabama.

Our hosts arranged for interesting, guided tours of the Barber Motorsports Park, Sloss Furnaces National Historic Landmark, and the Southern Museum of Flight. We learned about the struggle for civil rights with a sobering visit to the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church where four African American girls were murdered when a bomb planted by white supremacists exploded on Sunday September 15, 1963. We later visited the

Civil Rights Museum that details the history of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s.

We spent a morning working at the Jones Valley Teaching Farm near Woodlawn High School. This non-profit organization uses food to teach young people to lead healthier lives and build stronger communities through hands-on education. With eight sites around Birmingham, staff work with teachers and students to develop life skills, where food comes from, and healthy eating. Some of us picked flowers, kale, and collard greens for the farm stand while others cut plants that were done for the season. A few of us learned to “scuffle” otherwise known as hoeing weeds.

The journey ended with a farewell party where attendees were asked to dress in wear related to their ethnic background or one associated with a journey they’ve taken. In other words, a “Halloween Dress-up Party.”

This journey fostered new friendships and deepened our appreciation for Birmingham’s history and vibrant culture. Each day offered meaningful exchanges and memorable moments, making this journey truly unforgettable. We left inspired by the resilience of the community and grateful for the warmth extended to us throughout our stay.

After bidding farewell, some of the Madison members traveled on to Selma and Montgomery on the Civil Rights Trail.

Members participating in this journey were: Dorothy and John Baldwin, Ariel Ford, Margaret Harrigan, Donna and Tom Miller, Vicki and Ken Warren, Pat Watson, Stephanie Sorensen, David Blado, Donna Ulteig, and Hal Wissink. Ken and Vicki served as Journey Coordinators and Stephanie as Journey Treasurer.



**16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church, Birmingham. AL**

## ACTIVITIES

**Dining on the 6<sup>th</sup>  
Thursday  
November 6, 2025  
12:00 Noon**

**Zafferano Ristorante**  
2969 Cahill Main,  
Fitchburg



Directions: Take N. Fish Hatchery Road to Cahill Main. Turn left under the sky bridge of the Wyndham Garden Hotel. It's the last door on the left. The dining room is located on the second floor of the hotel, using 14 stairs or the elevator. Walk through the full bar to enter the enormous dining room whose big windows overlook the Nevin Springs Fish and Wildlife Area.

Zafferano's bridges Italian and Indian cuisine. As a fusion restaurant, it serves Indian takes on Italian classics like its most popular dish-- butter chicken pizza (\$21), and masala eggplant parmesan (\$21). They also have a traditional Indian menu with different types of biryani (chicken \$19, goat \$23), and a variety of curry dishes (\$16 to \$23) with some being spicy.

Their menu offers Italian, fusion and Indian appetizers (\$12 to \$22), Indian breads, soups and salads, fusion pizzas (\$18 to \$22), fusion and Italian entrees (\$21 to \$24), vegetarian and non-vegetarian Indian entrees (\$16 to \$23). Pizzas are classic with a little innovation.

Register by Monday, November 3, with host Gail Holmes, phone 608 249-1846 or email [glholmes@wisc.edu](mailto:glholmes@wisc.edu) to reserve your place. We always find time for Friendship Force fellowship with everyone. Please plan to wear your name tag.



## ACTIVITIES

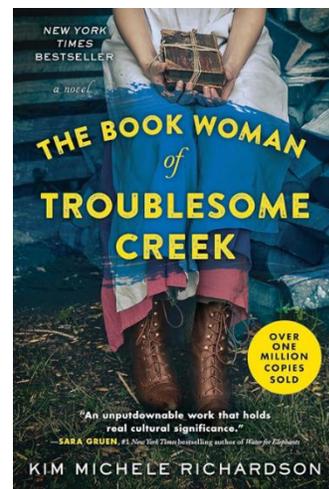
**Book Club  
Monday  
November 17, 2025  
7:00 PM Zoom**



The club met on Saturday, Oct0ber 4 (It was early in the month, to accommodate Ambassadors leaving for Birmingham.) and we had ten participants! We had a very good conversation centered on issues of racial injustice and our institutional memory of America's very complicated – and so often informationally compromised – racial history. We all learned much from these two excellent books – *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson, and *How the Word Is Passed* by Clint Smith. Highly recommended!

For November, we will be reading **The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek** by Kim Michele Richardson (2019), a novel set in the hard times in the beautiful mountains of Kentucky.

“Cussy Mary Carter is the last of her kind, her skin the color of a blue damselfly in these dusty hills. But that doesn't mean she's got nothing to offer. As a member of the Pack Horse Library Project, Cussy delivers books to the hill folk of Troublesome, hoping to spread learning in these desperate times. But not everyone is so keen on Cussy's family or the Library Project, and the hardscrabble Kentuckians are quick to blame a Blue for any trouble in their small town. The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek is a story of raw courage, fierce strength, and one woman's determination to bring a little bit of hope to the darkly hollers.”—Provided by publisher.



Some people have already read the book (this was also a choice for the FFI Book Club) and might want to read Richardson's next novel, *The Book Woman's Daughter*.

Our meeting will be on Monday, November 17, 7:00 P.M. by zoom. Get in touch if you would like to participate in the discussion, and we will email the zoom link to you. All are welcome! Reading is never required!

Marjie Marion ([midsi@aol.com](mailto:midsi@aol.com))

Marian Ehrenberg ([marianeh2014@gmail.com](mailto:marianeh2014@gmail.com))

“...once the tool of literacy is freed, you can't put that genie back in the bottle.” – Ron Hurst, chief of mission officer for The Colonial Williamsfriendshipburg Foundation and senior vice president of education and historic resources.

## ACTIVITIES



**2802 Dairy Drive, Madison,  
Wednesday, November 19, 2025**

Due to the Thanksgiving Holiday, Friendship Force's volunteer day has been moved to **Wednesday, November 19**. Please let our new leader, Mary Crave (mary.crave@wisc.edu) know of your participation by November 13.

In October, six of us bagged 1 ½ pounds of frozen peas into clear plastic bags and double sealed them. Twelve bags filled a box, 15 boxes per layer x 5 layers = 75 boxes or 1,350 pounds of peas per skid. And we filled more than two skids. Participants were Patrick Fleming and his friend Ron Geason, Gail Holmes, Diane Mertens, Larry Neuman, and Vivian Norton.

Ways in which YOU can help Second Harvest Food Bank of Southern Wisconsin are:

### **Monetary Donations**

Your contributions help us end hunger in southwestern Wisconsin. Every \$10 donation we receive provides up to 25 meals to folks facing food insecurity in our area.

### **Volunteering**

Giving your time is a great way to get involved in local hunger relief. You can volunteer as an individual or as part of a group.

### **Education and Voting**

Stay informed, educate yourself on the conditions that create hunger, and then head to the ballot box.

Second Harvest provides food support to thousands of families, seniors, and kids across southwestern Wisconsin through a network of 300 partner agencies and programs. They represent the pipeline through which food makes it onto the tables of those who need it.



## Friendship Force International

### **We Are Everyday Diplomats**

Friendship Force members play many roles. We are friends, change-makers, and adventurers. Whether we realize it or not, this also means that we are diplomats!

*Source: Friendship Force Insider: September News & Journeys, FFI, 09/29/2025*



**A World of Friends is a World of Peace**

## **BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

### **Co-Presidents & FFI Liasons**

Diane Mertens (608) 271-8657  
[mertensdk27@gmail.com](mailto:mertensdk27@gmail.com)

Larry Neuman (608) 271-8657  
[wlneuman@yahoo.com](mailto:wlneuman@yahoo.com)

### **Vice-President**

Kathy Johnson (608) 238-1785  
[kjohnson44@ameritech.net](mailto:kjohnson44@ameritech.net)

### **Secretary**

Vicki Warren (608) 617-2213  
[kenvie1@gmail.com](mailto:kenvie1@gmail.com)

### **Treasurer**

Deb Gunther (262) 422-0176  
[debgunther@gmail.com](mailto:debgunther@gmail.com)

### **Past President**

Doug Johnson (608) 238-1785  
[djohnson44@ameritech.net](mailto:djohnson44@ameritech.net)

## **ADDITIONAL BOARD MEMBERS**

### **Members at Large**

Donna Ulteig (608) 335-0639  
[donna.ulteig@yahoo.com](mailto:donna.ulteig@yahoo.com)

Dorothy Baldwin (608) 742-6493  
[janddbaldwin@gmail.com](mailto:janddbaldwin@gmail.com)

### **Newsletter/Historian**

Donna Hussin (608-770-0980)  
[djhussin@yahoo.com](mailto:djhussin@yahoo.com)

## **COMMITTEE CHAIRS**

### **Activities**

Gail Holmes (608) 249-1846  
[glholmes@wis.edu](mailto:glholmes@wis.edu)

### **E-Communications**

Sandi Wysock (608) 833-5326  
[sandrawysock@msn.com](mailto:sandrawysock@msn.com)

### **Journey Managers**

Kathy Speck Kemeny (608) 577-4885  
[kspeckemeny@gmail.com](mailto:kspeckemeny@gmail.com)

Tom Miller (608) 334-3327  
[tfmillerphoto@sbcglobal.net](mailto:tfmillerphoto@sbcglobal.net)

### **Membership**

Lise Skofronick ((608) 274-7732)  
[liskofronick@gmail.com](mailto:liskofronick@gmail.com)

### **Outreach**

Vacant

### **Program**

#### **Committee of 5**

Mary Crave ([mtrave@gmail.com](mailto:mtrave@gmail.com))  
Patrick Fleming ([pfleming@edgewood.edu](mailto:pfleming@edgewood.edu))  
Margaret Harrigan ([margaret.harrigan@wisc.edu](mailto:margaret.harrigan@wisc.edu))  
Ken Warren ([ken04271948@gmail.com](mailto:ken04271948@gmail.com))  
Pat Watson ([cc2ss@yahoo.com](mailto:cc2ss@yahoo.com))

## **ACTIVITIES LEADERS**

Gail Holmes, Chair [glholmes@wisc.edu](mailto:glholmes@wisc.edu)

### **Adopt-A-Highway**

Stephanie Vanden Bush [sljacobs2@gmail.com](mailto:sljacobs2@gmail.com)

### **Bike Rides**

Vivian Norton [vjoan@icloud.com](mailto:vjoan@icloud.com)  
Larry Neuman [wlneuman@yahoo.com](mailto:wlneuman@yahoo.com)

### **Book Club**

Marian Ehrenberg [marianeh2014@gmail.com](mailto:marianeh2014@gmail.com)  
Marjie Marion [midsi@aol.com](mailto:midsi@aol.com)

### **Dining on the 6th**

Gail Holmes [glholmes@wisc.edu](mailto:glholmes@wisc.edu)

### **Let's Walk/Let's Hike**

Maureen Kind [dmkind@sbcglobal.net](mailto:dmkind@sbcglobal.net)

### **Second Harvest Foodbank**

Mary Crave (608) 575-9847  
[mtrave@gmail.com](mailto:mtrave@gmail.com)

## **WISCONSIN FRIENDSHIP FORCE**

### **Official Publication of**

### **The Friendship Force of Wisconsin-Madison**

**5809 Julia St**

**Madison, WI 53705**

[www.ffwis.org](http://www.ffwis.org)

### **Email Accounts:**

[ffwis.general@gmail.com](mailto:ffwis.general@gmail.com)

[ffwis.meeting@gmail.com](mailto:ffwis.meeting@gmail.com)

[ffwis.outreach@gmail.com](mailto:ffwis.outreach@gmail.com)

[ffwis.membership@gmail.com](mailto:ffwis.membership@gmail.com)

**You are invited to celebrate friendship and the holiday season  
at the Friendship Force Wisconsin-Madison**



## **HOLIDAY PARTY**

**When:** *Sunday, January 4, 2026, from 1-4 pm*



**Where:** *Buck & Honey's – Monona (800 W Broadway #300, Monona, WI 53713)*

**What:** *Meal and Holiday Ornament Exchange (Please bring a wrapped holiday ornament from your travels that will be put in a basket for exchange.)*

Price includes a buffet entre choice of Salmon, Chicken or Vegetable dish, and includes salad, roll, two sides, & a dessert brownie

Note: Water is included & a cash bar offers alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages.

**Please RSVP to Diane Mertens with the form below and a check as payment by**

**December 21, 2025.**

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### ***FF Wisconsin-Madison Holiday Party RSVP Form***

Number of Club Members Attending: \_\_\_\_\_ (\$30 pp)

Number of Guests Attending: \_\_\_\_\_ (\$25 pp)

Who is coming (Print names)

Any Dietary Restrictions? \_\_\_\_\_

Amount Enclosed: \$ \_\_\_\_\_ (Make checks payable to FF Wisconsin-Madison)

Send this form and a check to: Diane Mertens, 2935 Forest Down, Fitchburg, WI 53711

Questions: email Diane: mertensdk27@gmail.com

