



friendship force
WISCONSIN - MADISON

ffwis.org

December 2025

CO-PRESIDENTS' MESSAGE

As we look to the end of the year and holiday season, we want to remind you that this is the time to renew your annual FFWM club membership. There will be a change in 2026. The Friendship Force International board announced a major new initiative, “**Membership for All**,” to steer the organization into a more secure future while affirming its core mission of promoting world peace and global citizenship. It is an effort to stabilize and grow FFI by strengthening recruitment, expanding hosting opportunities, and reducing dependence on travel revenue to fund core operations. FFI acknowledges that members in lower-income countries live in financial situations that make it very difficult for them to pay the same dues as FF members in high income countries. Starting in January 2026, FFI will roll out a new dues model.

The FFWM board will host a special membership meeting via Zoom in early January to explain the FFI “Membership for All” initiative and answer questions. As most club members know, the annual dues are made of two parts: a local club portion and FFI portion. There is no change in the local portion of \$10, but the FFI portion will increase to \$100. You can continue to pay the combined dues by check as in the past, or, starting in 2026, you will be able to pay the FFI portion directly to FFI electronically (via credit card or bank transfer) on an annual or monthly basis (at \$8.33 per month). To assist with the transition, FFI will not charge its share of total dues for the month of January 2026.

We hope you enjoy celebrating the holiday season and will join us at our holiday gathering. Please do not forget to send in your RSVP for our club holiday party on Sunday, January 4, at Buck & Honey's in Monona.

Happy Holidays!!

Diane and Larry



HOLIDAY PARTY!

Buck & Honey's Monona
January 4, 2026

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. **RSVP Form on last page of newsletter.**

Save THE *Date*

Special FFW-Madison
Membership Meeting
Saturday, January 10, 2026

The Friendship Force International CEO, Jeremi Snook, will join this special meeting to talk about the FFI's mission, vision, and plans for moving FF clubs forward; in addition, he will explain the new initiative, “Membership for All,” and the new dues structure. This special meeting will be held at the Fitchburg Public Library on Saturday, January 10, at 1:30 pm. All members are strongly encouraged to attend in person or via ZOOM. **Please RSVP to Diane Mertens by January 6th.** mertensdk27@gmail.com



Club Activities Calendar

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

December 15	Sacramento Interest Deadline	p. 4
December 15	Book Club	p.5
2026		
January 4	Holiday Party	p.1 & 9
January 6	Special Meeting Registration Deadline	p.1
January 10	Special Membership Meeting	p. 1
January 19	Book Club	p. 5
January 28	Second Harvest	p. 4
February 16	Book Club	p. 5
April 24-27	North American Regional Conference Memphis, TN	p.2
May 13-19	Sacramento, CA Outbound Journey	
July 14-21	Wairarapa, NZ Inbound Journey	
September	Lower Columbia, Inbound Journey	
Late September	Seferehisar, Türkiye Outbound Journey	

FRIENDSHIP FORCE INTERNATIONAL NEWS



Conference Opportunity

Memphis, Tennessee – April 24-27, 2025

The “Early Bird” registration has ended. However, our club is still offering to provide financial assistance to five club members who attend and who are willing to assume leadership roles in the Madison Club. The financial assistance is the conference registration fee plus some funds to partially cover hotel/transportation expenses (up to \$400 in total). Funded members who attend the conference are expected to make a report about what they learned at the conference to the board and become actively engaged by coordinating club journeys, leading a club committee or activity, or assuming other club leadership positions.

The North American Conference is being held at The Hyatt Centric Hotel on Beale Street in Memphis TN from April 24-27, 2026. For registration and more information about the North American Conference, see the FFI conference website: <https://my.friendshipforce.org/>.

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



Remember to check Wisconsin-Madison website (ffiwis.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!



A World of Friends is a World of Peace



CLUB NEWS

Mission-Focused Travel

One of the initiatives that grew out of the club's 2024 strategic planning is Mission-Focused Travel. We defined this as travel with a clear goal or intent for learning, understanding, supporting humanitarian efforts, and advancing sustainability. It's travel that is purposely designed to be more participatory and education oriented.

Recently, Friendship Force International (FFI), our parent organization announced they were soliciting funds for the development of a course on global citizenship. The ten-module course is designed to:

- Understand our role as a global citizen in a connected world
- Build practical skills in citizen diplomacy
- Show how travel creates understanding and making every journey an opportunity to learn and connect
- Apply insights gained in everyday life empowering participants to act as global citizens at home and abroad

This course appears to go a long way to help our club meet its goal of our travel and hosting be more Mission-Focused.

If interested in supporting this effort, click [here](#) to connect to the FFI donation site.

Please direct any questions about Mission-Focused Travel to Tom Miller, Chair of Ad Hoc Committee on Mission-Focused Travel and Education at tfmillerphoto@sbcglobal.net or 608-334-3327.



JOURNEY NEWS

Friendship Force's incoming and outgoing journeys allow travelers and hosts to learn from one another. By welcoming Ambassadors into our

homes and communities, we help them better understand diverse lifestyles, ultimately encouraging mutual respect, understanding, and lasting friendship. Similarly, when serving as Ambassadors during travel, we gain insight into new cultures and ways of life, subsequently sharing this knowledge upon our return.

In 2026, we have opportunities to host Ambassadors from New Zealand and Lower Columbia Washington and travel as Ambassadors to Sacramento and Seferihisar, Türkiye.

JOURNEY NEWS cont.

Sacramento

The dates for the Sacramento Journey are set for Wednesday May 13 to Tuesday May 19. If interested, the Journey Coordinators Pat Watson (cc2ss@yahoo.com) and Lise Skofronick (liserskofronick@gmail.com) request that you contact them by December 15. Watch for more details as they develop.

New Zealand

Journey coordinators George Wysock and Kathy Speck are forming a planning committee for the July 14-21 New Zealand inbound journey. This is an opportunity for members to home host Ambassadors from "Kiwiland" and show them Madison and the surrounding area. Much more to come.

Lower Columbia

Likewise, Journey Coordinators Kristen Mathews and Tom Miller are in the early stages of planning the inbound journey from Lower Columbia. Setting the dates for this journey is job one. We expect this journey will occur in late August or early September. Stay tuned.

Türkiye

The outbound journey to Seferihisar, Türkiye is tentatively scheduled for late September or early October. The Journey Managers are seeking two Ambassadors to serve as Journey Coordinators. Training and support are available.

Journey Treasurer

We are recruiting someone to take on the task of journey treasurer. Duties include working with journey coordinators in developing a budget, receiving and disbursing funds, and submitting a final report. With four journeys in 2026 it spreads out the work if there is a treasurer for each of the journeys. We have three continuing journey treasurers, Stephanie Sorensen, Mike Di Iorio, and Magdi Sebestyen. Thanks to Mary Juckem for serving in this role for the past couple of years.

If you have questions or would like to volunteer to help with inbound or outbound journeys contact Journey Managers, Kathy at kspeckemeny@gmail.com or 608-557-4885, and Tom at tfmillerphoto@sbcglobal.net or 608-334-3327. Your participation is crucial to ensuring successful and memorable journeys.



California State Capitol Museum

SACRAMENTO JOURNEY IS A GO

We have met by zoom with the Sacramento coordinators, Richard and Elaine Armstrong. We came away positive that by working together we will be able to create a successful trip.

A necessary ingredient for success is you our ambassadors. We have committed to 12-15 people for the dates of **Wednesday May 13 to Tuesday May 19**. We been asked to arrive by 4PM if possible on the 13th and on the 19th we will have breakfast and be on our way. With the uncertainty of plane and train schedules these days flexibility will be the word.

Since cost is often a concerned we enclose the following estimation. Richard feels on their part it will range from \$350 to \$500 (high end). Please remember you will also need to add the Friendship Force International fees and some misc ones.

At this time your coordinators need to know:

- A. Who is planning on going and is ready to fill out an application
- B. Who is quite interested but not quite sure yet.
- C. Who would like more information before making up their mind.

It will REALLY help us to have your response by **December 15** so we can begin planning in earnest. We both feel strongly we need to have all our steps accomplished, including any meetings we may need by the middle of February, March 1 at the latest. This is both to give you time to make traveling arrangements and for Richard and Elaine's benefit so they will be able to have hosts in place and set up all the reservations they may need.

Even if you've been to Sacramento before please consider going. Remember this is Friendship Force so we will be seeing it through our host eyes.

Your Coordinators:

Pat Watson cc2ss@yahoo.com 608-249-4486
 Lise Skofronick liserskofronick@gmail.com 608 712 7748

Dining on the 6th *isonALERT!*

Dining on the 6th will not be held in December or January due to the holidays and our annual holiday party. Watch for the February Dining on the 6th announcement.



Friendship Force WI-Madison Contributes to Second Harvest

We hear frequently of the increasing demand on food pantries. In keeping with our club's commitment to our community, Friendship Force of Wisconsin-Madison donated \$150 to Second Harvest of Southern Wisconsin this month. Thanks to Gail Holmes for proposing this gesture.

Say "cheese"! Gale Holmes, Donna Hussin, Patrick Fleming, and Mary Crave joined a large group of volunteers at Second Harvest on November 19. They cut and repackaged a variety of cheeses into 2-pound portions for delivery out to food pantries the next day. Cheese processors throughout southern Wisconsin donate their overruns and ends to Second Harvest.

We will NOT be volunteering at Second Harvest in December due to the holidays. We'll ask for volunteers after the New Year for **January 28, 2026**.

Have a pleasant Thanksgiving,

Mary Crave

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

ACTIVITIES

Book Club

All upcoming meetings are taking place by **ZOOM**.

Eight Book Club members met by zoom on November 17 for a fine discussion of *The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek*. Kim Michele Richardson's story of life during the Depression in an isolated mountain enclave was well told. The history of the FDR's Kentucky Pack Horse Library Project is truly inspiring, as literacy was shared with folks who otherwise had little chance of contact with or knowledge of the greater world.

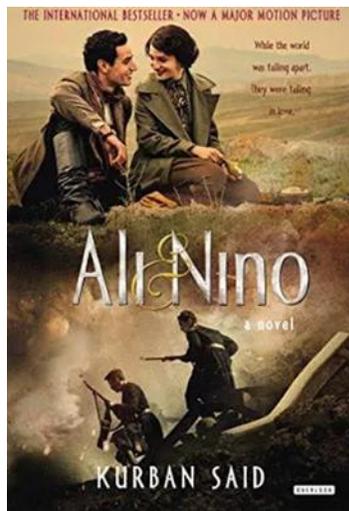
The story revolves around a young woman born with a rare genetic condition, causing her skin to be blue. The treatment she receives from her community is the focus of the story and made for a fascinating read. We spoke also of how these communities continue to suffer well into the 21st century.

Monday December 15 – 7:00 PM

Ali and Nino by Kurban Said (1937 in German; 1970 English translation). Baku, 1914-1920.

“Ali and Nino, two lovers from vastly different backgrounds, grow up together in carefree innocence in Baku on the Caspian Sea. Here, where Eastern and Occidental collide, they are inevitably drawn into the events of the First World War and the Russian Revolution. Torn apart by the turmoil, Ali joins the defense of Azerbaijan from the onslaught of the Red Army, and Nino flees to the safety of Paris with their child, not knowing whether they will ever see each other again. A sweeping tale, as romantic and gripping as *Gone with the Wind* or *Dr. Zhivago*, it portrays, against a gloriously exotic backdrop, the enduring love between childhood friends divided by their separate cultures.” - library description

4 copies in the library system (there are two separate listings - one with one copy, another with three copies). Also used copies are available from alibris.com and others for as little as \$.99 plus 4.99 shipping.



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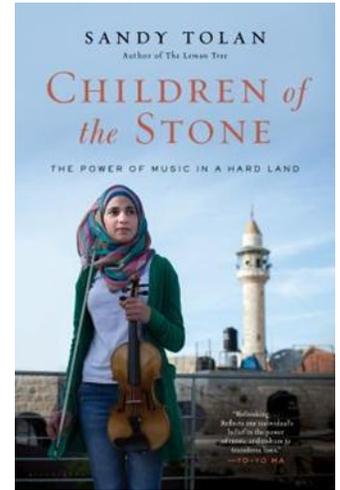
ACTIVITIES

Monday January 19 – 7:00 PM

Children of the Stone by Sandy Tolan (2015)

Non-fiction. “...the unlikely story of Ramzi Hussein Aburedwan, a boy from a Palestinian refugee camp in Ramallah who confronts the occupying army, gets an education, masters an instrument, dreams of something much bigger than himself, and then inspires scores of others to work with him to make that dream a reality... a story about music, freedom and conflict; determination and vision.” - alibris description

5 copies in the library system. Inexpensive copies available from alibris.com and others.

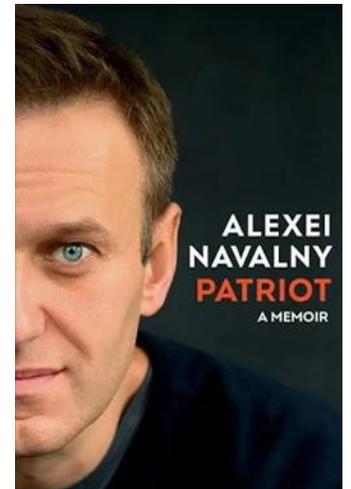


Monday February 16 - 7:00 PM

Patriot by Alexei Navalny (2024)

Alexei Navalny began writing *Patriot* shortly after his near-fatal poisoning in 2020. It is the full story of his life: his youth, his call to activism, his marriage and family, his commitment to challenging a world super-power determined to silence him, and his total conviction that change cannot be resisted--and will come. – library description

35 copies in the library system.



Hope to see you on one or all of these zoom discussions! Get in touch if you are not on the Book Club email list and would like to receive the zoom link. Also, if you have trouble getting one of the books, we have one or two copies to lend – just let us know. All are welcome, whether you have done the reading, or you just feel like listening in! A very busy season coming up, but we try to take time for reading.

Happy winter holidays!

Marjie Marion (midsi@aol.com) and Marian Ehrenberg (marianeh2014@gmail.com)

“Reading is a means of thinking with another person’s mind; it forces you to stretch your own.” Lionel Trilling

Sincere Condolences



Peter Kaufman

March 29, 1960 – October 21, 2025

Peter Kaufman - passed away October 21, 2025. He and his wife, Jan Viney, were members of our club from 2008 thru 2023. Peter served on the FFWM Board as "Member at Large" from 2019-2023. He was also a member of our electronic communications team and was instrumental in helping us implement Zoom during the Covid shut down.

The family is planning a Celebration of Peter's life on April 22, 2026 (Earth Day) in Madison, WI.

If so inclined, a gift can be paid to Wisconsin Council of the Blind (<https://wblind.org/donate>) or Madison Cat Project (<https://madisoncatproject.org/donate>)

Ryan Funeral Home & Cremation Services. Legacy Center
6728 Mader Drive, Madison, WI 53719
<https://www.ryanfuneralservice.com/obituaries/12860/Peter-Kaufman>

Sincere Condolences



Donna Belle Calvert

October 30, 1936 – November 8, 2025

Donna passed away November 8th. She was a member from 1992 through 2015. Donna was always full of life and interested in learning about the new Journey's. She served on the Board in many positions. She was president from 2003-2005. She also was the Journey Coordinator for the following Journey's

- 2002 Russian Leadership Program—Medical
- 2007 Australia, Tamworth/Bundaberg
- 2009 Azerbaijan, Baku
- 2012 Global Food Exchange
- 2014 Global Midwest Arts/Architecture

She has spread peace throughout the world.

Donna's Celebration of Life took place on November 14, 2025. In lieu of flowers, the family suggests memorials in Donna's name to Second Harvest Food Bank, or Agrace HospiceCare.

Cress Center, 6021 University Ave. Madison, (608) 238-8406
<https://www.cressfuneralservice.com/obituaries/donna-calvert>

Sincere Condolences



Judith Ann Blodgett
November 28, 1940 – November 16, 2025

Judi and her husband Ron were members since 1981. After he passed, she remained a member through 2017 and traveled with her sister Jan. Judi was very active in our club. She participated in many of the club activities and Journey's traveling around the world. She also gave back to the Friendship Force of Wisconsin - Madison by leading several Journey's. They were: Israel - Shefar-AM, Orange County, North East Ohio, Oxfordshire/Essex/Hampshire England, and San Juan Costa Rica where she showed calm and resourcefulness when problems arose.

Judi will be remembered for her love of travel and making friends in our club and around the world,

Funeral service for Judith was held at Gunderson East Funeral and Cremation Care, 5203 Monona Dr Madison on Tuesday, November 25, 2025.

In lieu of flowers she requested that donations be made to Bethel Horizons Scholarship Fund (bethelhorizons.org/give)

<https://www.gundersonfh.com/obituaries/Judith-Ann-Blodgett?obId=46445673>

Holidays

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

1807 –1882

The holiest of all holidays are those
Kept by ourselves in silence and apart;
The secret anniversaries of the heart,
When the full river of feeling overflows;
The happy days unclouded to their close;
The sudden joys that out of darkness start
As flames from ashes; swift desires that
dart
Like swallows singing down each wind
that blows!

White as the gleam of a receding sail,
White as a cloud that floats and fades in
air,
White as the whitest lily on a stream,
These tender memories are; — a Fairy Tale
Of some enchanted land we know not
where,
But lovely as a landscape in a dream



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Co-Presidents & FFI Liasons

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Vacant

Program

Committee of 5

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Margaret Harrigan (margaret.harrigan@wisc.edu)

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Pat Watson (cc2ss@yahoo.com)

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Larry Neuman wlneuman@yahoo.com

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Marian Ehrenberg marianeh2014@gmail.com

Marjie Marion midsi@aol.com

Dining on the 6th

Gail Holmes glholmes@wisc.edu

Let's Walk/Let's Hike

Maureen Kind dmkind@sbcglobal.net

Second Harvest Foodbank

Mary Crave (608) 575-9847
mtcrave@gmail.com

WISCONSIN FRIENDSHIP FORCE

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**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.

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

