



friendship force  
WISCONSIN - MADISON

ffwis.org

January 2026

## CO-PRESIDENTS' MESSAGE

FFWM “kicks off” the new year with a celebration of friendship at our Holiday Party on January 4. The coming year has much to offer FFWM club members. During 2026 two incoming and two outgoing Journeys are planned in addition to our monthly “Dining on the 6<sup>th</sup> gatherings,” Second Harvest volunteering, book club meetings, hiking and biking opportunities, and cultural programs. Those who traveled to Birmingham last fall will offer club members Southern cooking demonstrations and tastings in February

Despite these opportunities, as we look toward 2026, some of us may feel anxiety. Many Americans who are committed to greater inclusion, cultural understanding, and international peace found this past year to be very turbulent and disturbing. Studies of U.S. History show that events have not always flowed smoothly during the past two centuries. Some periods were characterized by increased exclusion, fear and bigotry, while others saw an expansion of hospitality, generosity, and compassion. Jimmy Carter and Wayne Smith founded Friendship Force in a more optimistic era than our current one. It was a time when an acceptance of diversity, empathic inclusion, and global citizenship were growing, and when nationalistic chauvinism and intolerance were waning.

The current CEO of Friendship Force International, Jeremi Snook, recognizes that conditions have changed and require serious attention. He noted that to protect Friendship Force and help it survive turbulent times is not enough. He seeks to chart a course for the organization that both reaffirms its original mission and core value of fostering global citizenship and that reshapes FF to enable it to better navigate global uncertainty, cultural shifts, and economic headwinds into the future

Some of us may not understand or be comfortable with the changes in Friendship Force. The proposed changes could be the most significant adjustment for our club since its founding in 1978. For this reason, the board of FFWM has called a special membership meeting on January 10, 2026, at the Fitchburg Library. We invited Jeremi Snook to join us via ZOOM to explain changes, address questions, and discuss the future direction of Friendship Force International and its impact on our local club.

We hope to celebrate with you on January 4, 2026 and learn about FFI's future direction on January 10.

Diane and Larry

Explore • Understand • Serve®



## HOLIDAY PARTY!

**Buck & Honey's Monona**  
**800 W. Broadway #300**  
**January 4, 2026**

Club members were encouraged to invite friends and acquaintances to join the fun at our holiday party, learn more about Friendship Force, and perhaps become club members. Reservations closed on December 21, 2025. We look forward to seeing you and celebrating the new year at Buck & Honey's in Monona on Sunday January 4.

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. **RSVP to Diane Mertens by January 6<sup>th</sup>.** [mertensdk27@gmail.com](mailto:mertensdk27@gmail.com)



# Club Activities Calendar



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

## 2026

January 4	Holiday Party	p.1
January 6	Special Meeting Registration Deadline	p.1
January 10	Special Membership Meeting	p. 1
January 19	Book Club	p.4-5
January 28	Second Harvest	p. 4
February 16	Book Club	p. 4-5
April 24-27	North American Regional Conference Memphis, TN	p.2
	<u>Journeys</u>	
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	



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!

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

# FRIENDSHIP FORCE INTERNATIONAL NEWS



## Conference Opportunity

### Memphis, Tennessee – April 24-27, 2025

Our club is offering to provide financial assistance to five club members to 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 in Memphis, TN April 24-27, 2026 and is being held at The Hyatt Centric Hotel on Beale Street. 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](mailto:Kjohnson44@ameritech.net)



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



## CLUB NEWS

**Presentation Invitation**  
**January 14, 2026**  
**2:00 PM**

### **Fitchburg Community Center**

Jan Barbone has been invited to do a presentation on Friendship Force to the Active Women of Fitchburg Center. The presentation will be held in the **Fitchburg Community Center, 5510 Lacy Rd., Fitchburg, WI 53711**. The meeting room is on the lower level of the building across from the kitchen.

If you have the day and afternoon free, come early to socialize and offer Jan moral support.

## JOURNEY NEWS



**WHEN: Saturday, FEBRUARY 7, 2026, from 2 to 5 PM**

**WHO:** The Birmingham Ambassadors and All Y'all FFW-Madison Members!

**WHY:** Leave the cold behind and come for some Southern hospitality complete with presentations and good food featuring some of the Southern recipes we learned about from our hosts.

**WHERE:** Lake Edge Lutheran Church, 4032 Monona Dr., Madison, WI 53716

*We can't wait to share our journey with y'all!*

Special request by Pat Watson: people who would like to help with the potluck please contact me at: [cc2ss@yahoo.com](mailto:cc2ss@yahoo.com) or 608 249 4486

## JOURNEY NEWS



Friendship Force's journeys help travelers and hosts learn from each other. Hosting Ambassadors fosters cross-cultural understanding and lasting friendships, while traveling as

Ambassadors offers firsthand insight into new cultures to share at home.

In 2026, we will have the opportunity to host Ambassadors from New Zealand and Lower Columbia, Washington, as well as participate as Ambassadors in visits to Sacramento, CA and Seferihisar, Türkiye.

### Sacramento

The dates for the Sacramento Journey are Wednesday May 13 to Tuesday May 19. The deadline to indicate interest was December 15 but there still is space. If interested, contact Journey Coordinators Pat Watson ([cc2ss@yahoo.com](mailto:cc2ss@yahoo.com)) and Lise Skofronick ([liserskofronick@gmail.com](mailto:liserskofronick@gmail.com)). Watch for more details as they develop.

### New Zealand

The inbound journey from New Zealand is scheduled for July 14–21. Coordinators George Wysock and Kathy Speck, along with Maureen Kind, Patrick Fleming, Dorothy Baldwin, and Donna Miller, are organizing events, reserving venues, and estimating fees. Magdi Sebestyen is the Journey Treasurer. When Ambassadors provide more details, the committee will be looking for hosts. Let's showcase Wisconsin's landscape and spirit.

### Lower Columbia

Journey Coordinators Kristen Mathews and Tom Miller recently met with Jane Pattison, who coordinates ambassadors for Lower Columbia, to discuss scheduling the upcoming journey. The official dates are expected to be announced by late January. Kristen and Tom are also seeking a few members to join the planning committee. If you're interested, please reach out to either of them.

### Türkiye

The journey to Seferihisar, Türkiye is currently planned for late September. The Journey Managers are looking for two Ambassadors to take on the role of Journey Coordinators. Training and support will be provided.

### Journey Treasurer

We are looking for an individual to serve as journey treasurer. Responsibilities involve collaborating with journey coordinators to create a budget, managing incoming and outgoing funds, and preparing a final report. If you would like more information, please contact Tom Miller.



## JOURNEY NEWS

cont.

If you have questions or want to volunteer to help with inbound or outbound journeys 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.

## ACTIVITIES

### Dining on the 6<sup>th</sup> ALERT!

Dining on the 6<sup>th</sup> will not be held in February due to the Birmingham event. Watch for the March Dining on the 6<sup>th</sup> announcement in next month's newsletter.



### 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 in November. Thanks to Gail Holmes for proposing this gesture.

We did not volunteer at Second Harvest in December due to the holidays. We are asking for volunteers for **January 28, 2026**. Please call Mary Crave (608-575-9847) or email her ([mtcrave@gmail.com](mailto:mtcrave@gmail.com)) by Monday, January 26 to let her know you are coming.

Mary Crave

## ACTIVITIES

### Book Club



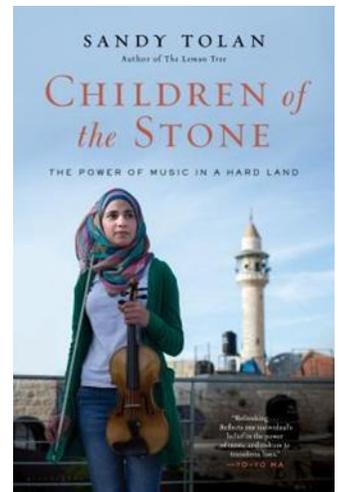
Four members sat before our respective computer screens on December 15 for a thoughtful discussion of the novel *Ali and Nino* by Kurban Said. The comfortable lives of a young couple from different religious backgrounds (Moslem and Christian) one hundred years ago in Azerbaijan became startlingly difficult as World War I and then the Russian Revolution descended upon their city and country. This fascinating story truly took us far from our homes, in time, place, and culture.

Our next two meetings will take place by zoom.

Monday Jan 19 – 7:00

*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. That dream is of a music school in the midst of



Ramallah, a school that will transform the lives of thousands of children through music... *Children of the Stone* is a story about music, freedom and conflict; determination and vision. It's a vivid portrait of life amid checkpoints and military occupation, a growing movement of nonviolent resistance, the past and future of musical collaboration across the Israeli-Palestinian divide and the potential of music to help children see new possibilities for their lives." - alibris description

5 copies in the library system. All are checked out at the time of this notice, but inexpensive copies are available from alibris.com and others.

# ACTIVITIES

## Book Club cont.

Monday Feb 16 - 7:00

*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.” – alibris description



35 copies in the library system.

Hope to see you on one or both 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 a book let one of us know. We might have one to lend. All are welcome at the meetings, whether you have done the reading or you just feel like listening in to see what we are up to.

Start the new year with some worthwhile reading!

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

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

*Cheers to a new year and another chance for us to get it right.*

**Oprah Winfrey**



## 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  
[kenvic1@gmail.com](mailto:kenvic1@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 ([mtcrave@gmail.com](mailto:mtcrave@gmail.com))  
Patrick Fleming ([pflaming@edgewood.edu](mailto:pflaming@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  
[mtcrave@gmail.com](mailto:mtcrave@gmail.com)

## **WISCONSIN FRIENDSHIP FORCE**

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5809 Julia St  
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[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)