



friendship force  
WISCONSIN - MADISON

ffwis.org

February 2026

**CO-PRESIDENTS' MESSAGE**

The FFWM Special Meeting at the Fitchburg Public Library Zoom on January 10 was well attended and informative. Approximately 30 club members, including two guests, were present. The highlight was a ZOOM presentation and Q&A session with FFI CEO Jeremi Snook and comments by three FFI staff members.

Jeremi gave an overview of the FFI core mission and plans for moving FFI clubs forward. FFI is shifting away from being a "social-travel club with homestays for retired people" and moving toward being an intergenerational organization that promotes cross-cultural interaction and global understanding. FFI is developing educational opportunities, including online courses and seminars, podcasts, and articles to assist club members in learning about cross-cultural understanding and global citizenship. To broaden the FFI membership base, FFI will develop Journey opportunities for families with children of various ages.

Jeremi was candid about the reasons for changing the dues' structure. Past FFI finances depended on Journey travel fees and equal membership dues regardless of a country's cost of living. During COVID, all FF Journeys stopped, and their number never returned to pre-COVID levels. As Journeys dropped by 25-30 percent, FFI-related Journey costs grew. In addition, FF members in lower-income countries were being priced out. Fees and membership dues that were reasonable for US (and European) FF members were very high for members living in low- and middle-income countries.

The new FFI initiative, "Membership for All," calibrates membership dues to a country's economic level. In the past, FF members from higher-income countries paid low dues relative to those in low-income countries. For example, what a United States FF member spent for a restaurant dinner for one person could equal a week's grocery bill for a FF club member's family of four in a low-income country. The new initiative attempts to end unequal cost burdens and adjust to a country's living standards. In addition to dues adjustment, FFI is attempting to diversify its revenue sources and depend less on Journey fees. FFI is seeking donations from foundations and philanthropists to build an endowment fund that will stabilize its financial future.

Our club's updated membership renewal forms have been sent out and are due by January 31. This year the combined dues (for FFI and our local club) will be \$80 (\$70 for FFI dues and \$10 for local club dues). The \$80 total dues include \$30 contributed from the FFWM club's reserves to reduce the FFI's \$100 portion during 2026 only.

All club activities and operations depend on volunteering. As Jeremi stressed in his presentation, **"Everyone should do**



**Wisconsin State Capitol – Madison, WI**

**something, and everyone can do something."** On your membership renewal form, please indicate your interest in club activities and in volunteering. We are currently recruiting members to join two committees: Membership and Outreach. Members interested in greater club involvement are encouraged to attend the FFI North American Regional Conference April 24 - 27, 2026, in Memphis TN. The club will provide a \$400 expense reimbursement. There is a volunteer opportunity on Saturday, March 7, 2026, to staff the FFWM outreach table at the Overture Center International Festival. In late March or early April, you will be sent ballots to elect officers for 2026-27. Our Annual Meeting is scheduled for April 18 or 19 at the Fitchburg Public Library. Lastly, our club will celebrate World Friendship in March. We are looking for ways to celebrate global friendship and to include families in those celebrations; we welcome your suggestions.

Happy Valentine's Day  
Diane and Larry

**Club Activities Calendar**



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

**2026**

February 16	Book Club	p. 4
February 25	Second Harvest	p. 4
March 1	World Friendship Day	p. 2
March 6	Dining on the 6th	p. 3
March 7	International Festival	p. 2
April 24-27	North American Regional Conference Memphis, TN	p.2

Journeys

May 13-19	Sacramento, CA Outbound Journey
September	Lower Columbia, Inbound Journey
Late September	Seferehisar, Türkiye Outbound Journey

# FRIENDSHIP FORCE INTERNATIONAL NEWS

## World Friendship Day- March 1

World Friendship Day is observed each year worldwide by Friendship Force members on March 1. The organization was officially established on that date in 1977. President Jimmy Carter introduced the organization's mission to a group of state governors at the White House asking the governors to return to their states and identify a volunteer leader who would serve as State Director for the Friendship Force in their state. The date is important as it reflects the organization's core mission of fostering global understanding and bridging the culture divides and barriers that separate people. FFI encourages its members to celebrate on that day or sometime in March as a way to honor the connections that enrich our lives.

Looking for some ideas? Here are some suggestions:

- Host a Dinner: invite family, friends, fellow FF members to share a meal and encourage each to bring a dish from their culture to create an international feast.
- Volunteer at Second Harvest and gather for a Happy Hour event afterwards and share your favorite FF memories.
- Participate in Overture Center International Festival to introduce FF to friends and the local community.



### Conference Opportunity

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

Still thinking about the conference? The club is offering financial assistance (up to \$400 per person) for up to five club members to attend and who are willing to assume leadership roles in the Madison Club. The financial assistance covers the conference registration fee plus some funds toward hotel/transportation expenses. A report is expected to the Board on what they learned at the conference 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)

# CLUB NEWS

## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Please welcome **Steve Borcharding** and **Faith Lerner** who joined our club in January. Should they be at the February 7 Birmingham event take the time to introduce yourself and welcome them to our club.



**Saturday March 7, 2026**

**10:00 AM - 5:00 PM**

**Overture Center, 201 State Street  
Madison, Wisconsin 53703**

To promote Friendship Force goals and our club's presence in the Madison community, Friendship Force of Wisconsin-Madison is participating in the International Festival of the Arts at the Overture Center on Saturday, March 7, 2026 from 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM.

Volunteers are needed to staff a booth. Please consider sharing our mission and your knowledge, support, and welcoming energy with festival participants for an hour, two hours or more. Click on the following email [madcapjan@yahoo.com](mailto:madcapjan@yahoo.com) or call Jan Barbone at 608-219-7479 to sign-up for times that you are available to volunteer. Thanks so much and please come to the International Festival of the Arts.



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



## JOURNEY NEWS

**Birmingham Journey Event**  
**February 5, 2026**  
**Saturday 2-5 PM**  
**Lake Edge Lutheran Church**  
**4032 Monona Dr., Madison Dr 53716**

The Birmingham ambassadors invite all FFWM members for some Southern hospitality complete with presentations and good food featuring some of the Southern recipes we learned about from our hosts

Please RSVP to Vicki Warren at [kenvic1@gmail.com](mailto:kenvic1@gmail.com) by February 1 or call me at 608-617-2213

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

## 2026 Journey Updates

### Sacramento

The Sacramento Journey is scheduled to take place from Wednesday, May 13 to Tuesday, May 19. Journey coordinators Pat Watson ([cc2ss@yahoo.com](mailto:cc2ss@yahoo.com)) and Lise Skofronick ([liskofronick@gmail.com](mailto:liskofronick@gmail.com)) are collaborating with the Host Coordinators to develop the program for the ambassadors.

### New Zealand now

On January 7, our club was informed that the New Zealand group cancelled their planned journey to Madison and Winnipeg due to insufficient participation. Although this was disappointing, we subsequently contacted the Friendship Force of Quad Cities to inquire about their interest in a brief stay. They have expressed interest, and arrangements are currently being made for a proposed 3–4-night visit in mid-July. The planning committee will reconvene to organize the details of this journey. Further updates will be provided as information becomes available.

### Türkiye

The journey to Seferihisar, Türkiye is scheduled for late September. The Journey Managers are actively seeking two ambassadors to serve as Journey Coordinators. Comprehensive training and ongoing support will be provided to those selected for these roles.

### Lower Columbia

The inbound journey from Lower Columbia, Washington is set for mid-October 2026, with exact dates to be confirmed soon. Journey Coordinators Kristin Mathews and Tom Miller are looking for planning team volunteers—contact them to join.

## JOURNEY NEWS cont.

If you have questions or are interested in volunteering 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 involvement is essential for achieving successful and impactful journeys.

## ACTIVITIES

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

Dining on the 6<sup>th</sup> is not being held in February because of the Birmingham event.

Mark your calendar to join us for March's Dining on the 6<sup>th</sup>.



**Erin's Snug Irish Pub.**  
**Friday, March 6, 2026**  
**12:00 PM for lunch**  
**4601 American Parkway**  
**Madison. WI 53718**

In the huge list of Madison-area ethnic restaurants, there is only one Irish restaurant listed! We enjoyed Erin's Snug Irish Pub's menu so much the last few years that we're giving you another chance to enjoy a different dish this year!

To drive to Erin's Snug Irish Pub, take I-39/I-90/I-94 west to Highway 151 (East Washington Avenue). Here take exit 135B toward Sun Prairie. Then take exit 98B to American Parkway. Erin's is straight ahead on the right corner of Eastpark Boulevard and American Parkway.

In Olde Ireland, the word "Pub" was short for Public House which was used as a gathering spot for friends to catch up on the latest news, gossip, and discuss the events of the day. Experience Ireland in all of its glory and see what "Pub Life" is all about and enjoy the "camaraderie while partaking of food and beverage" with your Friendship Force friends.

Their lunch menu has the usual entrees: appetizers, soups, salads, a wide variety of classic sandwiches, and wraps. You can add colcannon (mashed potatoes and cabbage), thin cut fries or sweet potato fries, and baked potato for \$3.99. Pub fries are \$4.99. Most entrees are \$13.99 to \$15.99. Irish Specialties shepherd's pie, cottage pie, Guinness stew, Murphy's Irish stew, bangers & mash, and fish & chips are \$17.99 or \$18.99.



Corned beef & cabbage and Irish breakfast are \$19.99. You might want to save room for desserts like Guinness chocolate cake or Bailey’s Irish cheesecake and specialty drinks from the bar.

Tis the day for “wearing of the green” in honor of St. Patrick’s Day in March. And you’ll also want to wear your name tag!

Please register by Tuesday, March 3, with host Gail Holmes, phone 608 249-1846 or email [glholmes@wisc.edu](mailto:glholmes@wisc.edu). Dining will be in one of the public rooms so that we don’t incur a room charge for our reservation.



**Friendship Force WI-Madison Contributes to Second Harvest**

Join us February 25 for our monthly commitment at Second Harvest, 2602 Dairy Drive, Madison. The 12:30-3:30 PM shift goes quickly with fellow volunteers. Please let Mary Crave know by Monday, February 23 if you can help. [mtcrave@gmail.com](mailto:mtcrave@gmail.com) or 608-575-9847

**Book Club**

Six members met on January 19 to discuss *Children of the Stone*, a 2015 publication by Sandy Tolan. As Tolan sites, he tried “to show what it’s like for ordinary Palestinians to live under a military occupation...” detailing “day-to-day- life under its most enduringly corrosive aspect: Israel’s forty-seven year occupation of the West Bank.” Sixteen years on, make that sixty-seven years, and Israeli settlements in the West Bank have multiplied. While his earlier book, *The Lemon Tree*, focused on both sides of the conflict, here he brought us the story of one Palestinian boy, growing up in a world that could easily crush ambition and hope - and how his extraordinary determination served as he created positive results for children. An exceptionally well researched book (over 100 pages of notes, bibliography and index) we were all glad to have read the story of Ramzi Hussein Aburedwan.

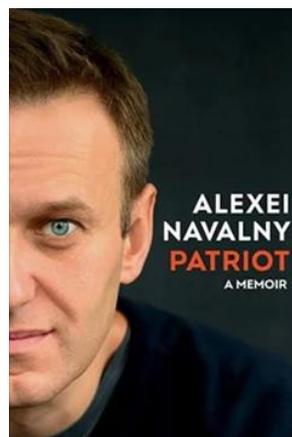


Marian was unable to participate in the discussion, but she wrote that “the refugee camps are really hard to visit, as I did a few years back, because they are so devoid of much that Israelis take for granted. No nice green lawns surround these places, and the walls of the spiral stairwells are filled with the stories and pictures of their struggle for their homeland and for peace. It is, thus, amazing to me to see the ends to which Ramzi goes to defend his people and to bring the peaceful beauty of music to them. And, of course, what I saw then bears no resemblance to the destroyed Gaza today. I think both Daniel [Barenboim] and Ramzi went as far as they could to find common ground, in terms of music...but, there is that final limit that severed their relationship.” Thank you, Marian!

Our next meeting will also take place by zoom. Monday February 16, 7:00 pm

**Patriot** by Alexei Navalny (2024)

"The powerful and moving memoir of a fearless political opposition leader who paid the ultimate price for his beliefs. 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. In vivid, page-turning detail, including never-before-seen correspondence from prison, Navalny recounts, among other things, his political career, the many attempts on his life, and the lives of the people closest to him, and the relentless campaign he and his team waged against an increasingly dictatorial regime. Written with the passion, wit, candor, and bravery for which he was justly acclaimed, Patriot is Navalny's final letter to the world: a moving account of his last years spent in the most brutal prison on earth; a reminder of why the principles of individual freedom matter so deeply; and a rousing call to continue the work for which he sacrificed his life." – alibris description



The first hundred pages (mostly his childhood) have flown by for me. Hopefully many will read this worthwhile book and come to our discussion. There are 35 copies in the library system. Everyone is welcome to attend the meeting and no reading is required. So come if you are interested in seeing what we are up to.

Finally, we have a new zoom link, so watch for that. It will be sent out a few days before the meeting.

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

## ACTIVITIES cont.



### Freeze for Food 5K/10K Walk/Run Saturday, March 7, 2026, Vilas Park Shelter

Some of our members have participated in past years. The event is being organized by the Returned Peace Corps of Wisconsin-Madison. They are proudly raising money for Open Doors for Refugees, a local Madison non-profit.

This is the 45<sup>th</sup> year with the first event being held in 1982. The organization is proud to bring people together to support food security and community building.. If you are not a runner or walker you can donate.

Registrations is open right up to race time on March 7. You will find all the details at this website:

<https://runsignup.com/Race/WI/Madison/RPCVFreezeForFood>

Thanks to Lise Skonfronick for sharing this information.



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**

## CAPTURING THE EVENT

### Holiday Party, January 4, 2026, Buck & Honey's, Monona



Margaret Harrigan (R) displaying a Budapest ornament from Jan Babone (L)



Welcoming New members Steve Borcharding and Faith Lerner



Enjoying the view while deep in conversation are Magdi Sebestyen (L) and Agnes Rona (R)

# CAPTURING THE EVENT

Membership Meeting, January 10, 2026  
Fitchburg Public Library

Presenter, Jeremi Snook



Friendship Force International CEO

Listening to Jeremi Snook talk.



First Row Left – Right, Gale Holmes. Mauren Kind  
Second Row Left – Right, Doug Johson, Kathy Johnson

# CAPTURING THE EVENT



I

Conversation about the presentation by Jeremi Snook  
Left–Right = Gail Holmes, Tom Miller, Mary Crave,  
and Larry Neuman



## **BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

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

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Larry Neuman (608) 271-8657  
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### **Vice-President**

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### **Secretary**

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### **Treasurer**

Deb Gunther (262) 422-0176  
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## **ADDITIONAL BOARD MEMBERS**

### **Journey Managers**

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Tom Miller (608) 334-3327  
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### **Members at Large**

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### **Newsletter/Historian**

Donna Hussin (608-770-0980)  
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### **Past President**

Doug Johnson (608) 238-1785  
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## **COMMITTEE CHAIRS**

### **Activities**

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### **E-Communications**

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### **Membership**

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### **Outreach**

Vacant

### **Program**

#### **Committee of 5**

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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**

### **Official Publication of**

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