



friendship force
WISCONSIN - MADISON

ffwis.org

May 2026



Wisconsin State Capitol – Madison, WI

CO-PRESIDENTS' MESSAGE

We enjoyed seeing many club members at the FFW-M Annual Meeting on Saturday, April 18, 2026. In addition to the business portion of the meeting that involved electing club officers, approving the annual budget, and voting on bylaw revisions, we had a short program that highlighted refugees and asylum seekers, especially those living in the Madison area.

Many members generously donated items or money to Open Doors for Refugees or purchased items from Huda, an Iraqi refugee, who sold her handcrafted work. The membership should know that a small donation was sent to the local Madison chapters of Open Doors for Refugees and to *Voces de la Frontera* in honor of the two presenters.

We would like to thank the many club members and officers who helped make the meeting a success, including Kathy Johnson, Lise Skofronick, Gail Holmes, Tom Miller, Stephanie Sorenson, Mary Linquist, and Sandi Wysock.

Ongoing club activities, such as Dining on the 6th, Second Harvest, Book Club, and Highway Cleanup continue into the summer.

Turning to club Journeys, as of April 25, we have not received 2027 Journey assignments from FFI, but we have four Journeys coming up in the next six months. May marks the first outbound Journey of 2026 to Sacramento, CA May 13 – May 19. Several members from the Milwaukee FF club will join our Journey. An inbound Journey from the Quad Cities is scheduled for July 14 – 18. It starts on the same day, July 14, as our club's Annual Picnic. Our club's outbound Journey to Seferehesir, Turkey, in late September is currently on hold. Journey Managers, Tom and Kathy, are seeking Journey Coordinators and Ambassadors for this Journey. An inbound Journey from Lower Columbia (i.e., Oregon and Washington state) is scheduled for October 13-20.

We hope you will participate in many of these activities and volunteer to assist with them.

With gratitude,

Diane and Larry

Club Activities Calendar



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

2026

May 6	Dining on the 6th
May 13-19	Sacramento, CA Outbound Journey
May 18 or 19	Tentative for Book Club
May 27	Second Harvest
June 7	Adopt a Highway
June 24	Second Harvest
July 14	Club's Annual Picnic
July 14-18	Quad Cities Inbound Journey
July 29	Second Harvest
August 26	Second Harvest
September 8	Adopt a Highway
September 30	Second Harvest
Late September	Seferehisar, Türkiye Outbound Journey
October 11	Adopt a Highway
October 13-20	Lower Columbia (Washington State) Inbound Journey
October 28	Second Harvest
November 18	Second Harvest



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FRIENDSHIP FORCE IN INTERNATIONAL NEWS

FFW- MADISON 2026 ANNUAL MEETING

FFI 2026 Training Schedule

These workshops are designed for both new and experienced members who want to deepen their understanding of FFI programs, roles and tools.

All times are Eastern Time Zone.

May

- Travel Insurance Q&A-May 7, 7:00 PM
- New Member Orientation-May 20, 12:00 PM

June

- General Club & Journey Q&A-June 11, 7:00 PM

July

- Open World Information Session-July 1, 12:00 PM
- Journey Coordinator Training-July 13, 1:00 PM

August

- New Member Orientation-August 3, 11:00 AM

September

- Matching Process-September 7, 8:30 PM
- New Member Orientation-September 10, 2:00 PM
- Planned Special Journeys-*Date TBD*

October

- New Member Orientation-October 5, 7:30 PM
- Recruiting New Members-October 22, 7:00 PM
- General Club & Journey Q&A-*Date TBD*
- Independent Journeys-*Date TBD*

November

- New Member Orientation-November 11, 1:00 PM
- Travel Insurance Q&A-November 17, 1:00 PM

December

- New Member Orientation-*Date TBD*

An overview of all 2026 workshops, registration links, and available recordings, can be found on FFI's website:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1hu86Sm-EcWzjXQQY6Rne5WbFsVcbA7CctfWHHeSy-Og/edit?_kx=4j7SMbWBJpbKMw6djTVJ1vEQC1LM0m8Ncr39pMtYnM.RaH2Qb&gid=1356194104#gid=13561click94104

(Control + click to follow link)



Club Annual Picnic

July 14, 2026

Huegel-Jamestown Park

5810 Williamsburg Way, Madison, WI

Our club's Annual Meeting on April 18 at the Middleton Library was a real success and offered club members opportunities to actively participate in the business meeting, to learn about the lives of immigrants and refugees in the Madison area, and to enjoy each other's company and delicious desserts procured by Kathy Johnson.

Over 30 club members, including two new club members and two prospective members, attended. During the business meeting, Stephanie Sorenson, chairperson of the Nomination Committee, offered a slate of club officers for 2026-27, and Sandi Wysock announced voting results. The following officers were elected: Kathy Johnson (President), Mary Crave & Tom Miller (Co-Vice Presidents), Vicki Warren (Secretary), and Deb Gunther (Treasurer). The membership also approved a revision to Article VI, Section 1 of the club's bylaws that the board had recommended. The revision allows both the club Secretary and Treasurer, who are elected annually, to serve for up to five consecutive terms. In addition, Tom Miller updated club members on the status of upcoming Journeys and made an appeal for Journey coordinators. Two coordinators are still needed to lead the outbound Journey to Turkey in fall. Gail Holmes was honored for her many years of remarkable service to the club. She is the Activities Committee chairperson, organizes dining on the 6th, and assists monthly at Second Harvest. Gail has held other club leadership positions, traveled on many journeys, and has made numerous contributions to the vitality of our club.

After the formal business meeting and announcements, Lise Skofronick introduced two speakers. Both have worked for years to assist Madison-area migrants and refugees. Irene Wren was an immigration lawyer, and Madeline Ura-neck, is an author and international educator.

Members learned about immigration and refugee issues and about a local organization, Open Doors for Refugees. Irene Wren explained and outlined differences between a refugee and an asylum seeker and took audience questions. Madeline Ura-neck provided an overview of the work that Open Doors for Refugees does to assist with the settlement of refugees who come from many countries. She also provided information about Islam and a short quiz on Iraq. Madeline then introduced Huda Alalawi, a refugee from Iraq who arrived in Madison 12 years ago. Huda talked about her challenges and life in Madison. Both Ms. Ura-neck and Huda took questions from the audience. Huda founded a business that she named "Knitting for Peace." After her presentation, she sold items that she crafted. Attendees were invited to make financial contributions and/or to donate household goods to Open Door for Refugees.

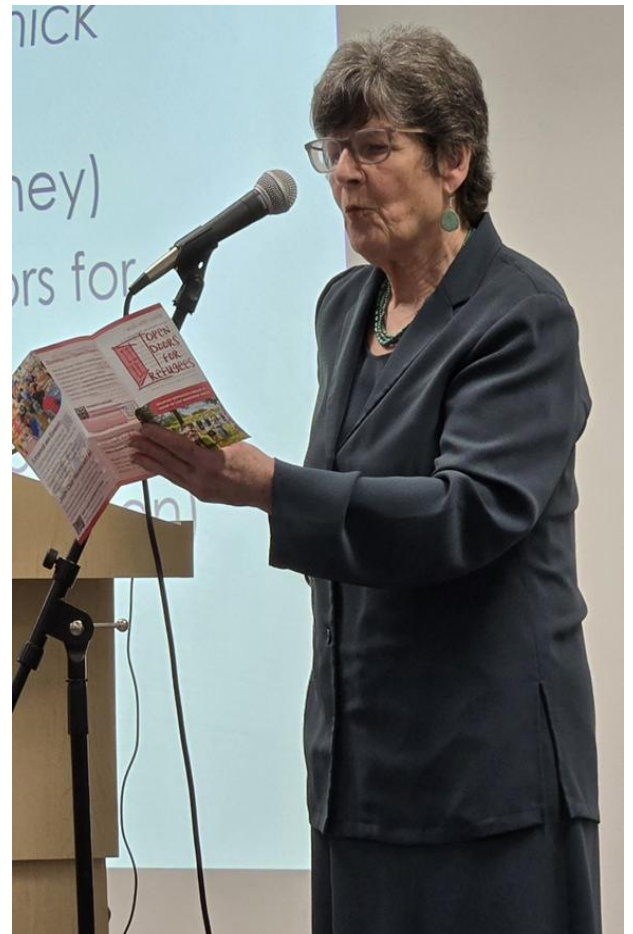
Larry Newman, Co-President



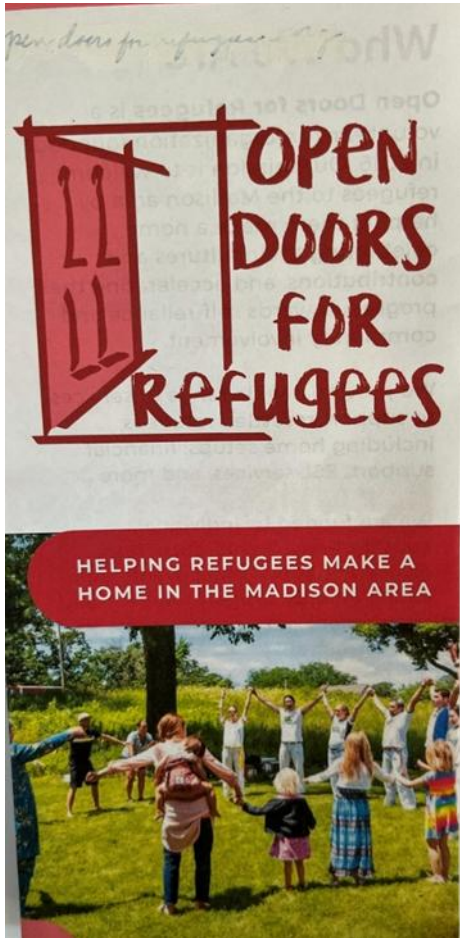
Annual Meeting April 18, 2026 Middleton Public Library



**Irene Wren, Presentation
Difference between a Refugee and Asylum Seeker**



**Madeline Uraneck, Presentation
Open Doors for Refugees**



Huda, Alalawi, Refugee from Iraq in 2014



Huda Alalawi and her business "Knitting for Peace"



Huda Alalawi and her business, “Knitting for Peace”

CLUB NEWS

Annual Meeting Member Recognition

**Friendship Force Wisconsin-Madison
Presents**

**The Outstanding Volunteer Award
To**

Gail Holmes

April 18, 2026





JOURNEY NEWS

Here is the latest update regarding our club's journeys.

Sacramento

In a few days, fourteen Ambassadors from Madison and Milwaukee will journey to Sacramento for six days of learning and friendship. You might be wondering what Madison and Sacramento have in common. Both are state capitals with a steady base of public-service employment. Each serves as a major center of higher education: Madison with the University of Wisconsin-Madison, while Sacramento is home to California State University, Sacramento and the nearby land-grant University of California, Davis.

They both share a “big, small city” feel, offering excellent restaurants, arts, music, professional opportunities, and diverse neighborhoods. Access to outdoor recreation is another similarity: Madison has its lake, parks, and bike trails, while Sacramento enjoys its riverfront and access to hiking, biking, and nearby natural beauty. Both have strong economies and a high quality of life. There is much to savor and enjoy.

We're eager to hear their stories when they return.

Quad Cities

The final plans for hosting the Quad Cities Iowa Friendship Force Club are nearing completion. Ten Ambassadors (two couples and six singles) will arrive on Tuesday July 14 and depart on Saturday July 18. The welcome event will be held in conjunction with our annual club picnic on July 14 at Huegel-Jamestown Park at 5810 Williamsburg Way, Madison. Watch for more details as soon as they are finalized. Journey committee co-chairs Kathy Speck and George Wysock are recruiting volunteers to serve as home hosts, day hosts, and dinner hosts. Please contact them to volunteer.

Lower Columbia

Planning is underway for the inbound journey from Lower Columbia, Washington October 13-20, 2026. Thanks to members LoLa Barrientos Marquez, Faith Lerner, Vivian Norton, and Hank Weiss for accepting the call to serve on the planning committee led by Journey Coordinators Tom and Donna Miller. We are recruiting volunteers to serve as home hosts, day hosts, and dinner hosts. Contact the coordinators to sign up. Many more details to come.

Seferihisar, Türkiye

Pronunciation:

(seh-fed-ree-he-sar)



Thank you to Maureen Kind for volunteering as Journey Coordinator for the mid-to-late September trip to Seferihisar, Türkiye. We're seeking another volunteer to help with planning and coordination, so preparations with the host club can begin.

Recent travelers to Turkey (March 2026), Sandi and George Wysock, reported that despite the Iran war, they had no concerns about their safety in Turkey. They experienced nothing but friendliness and hospitality toward Americans. **If you are interested in participating in this journey, please contact Maureen Kind as soon as possible, but no later than May 12 at dmkind@sbcglobal.net or 608-274-6754.** Ambassador applications will open once the exact dates are confirmed.

2027 Journeys

The 2027 journey assignment notice from FFI has not yet been received. Look out for an email as soon as it arrives.

If you have questions about Friendship Force journeys, please reach out to Journey Managers: Kathy at kspeckemeny@gmail.com or 608-557-4885, and Tom at tfmillerphoto@sbcglobal.net or 608-334-3327.

Your involvement is essential for our journeys to succeed.

Invitation to Join Another Club's Journey

Utah Friendship Force is planning to visit Cedar Rapids-Iowa City October 7-14, 2026. They are looking for individuals from other clubs who might want to join them. If interested you can contact any of the following people:

Judy Cohen, judycohen@xmission.com, Ambassador Coordinator from Utah

Nancy York, stampingtonancy@gmail.com, Host Coordinator from Cedar Rapids

Judy Frascht-Miner, jjbm526@aol.com, Journey Coordinator from Cedar Rapids

Please share with your club members.

Judy Frascht-Miner

You can learn about the Cedar Rapids-Iowa Club on the FFI website. <https://my.friendshipforce.org/en/clubs/653>

ACTIVITIES

Adopt a Highway Clean Up Monday, April 20

Thank you to Donna and Tom Miller and Katie Martinson for joining our April AAH clean up. It turned out to be a very pleasant day. There was a lot of garbage after the long winter season and we will continue to work on it at our next clean up, **Sunday June 7, 6-8pm**. I hope to see you there!



These are the dates for the rest of 2026:

- Sun June 7, 6-8 pm
- Tues Sept 8, 10am-12pm
- Sun Oct 11, 2-4pm

Please contact Stephanie Vanden Bush (sljacobs2@gmail.com or 920-676-1441) to commit or with questions

Book Club

On April 19, eight members of the book club met at Maureen's home for an interesting discussion of Elif Shafak's novel, *The Island of Missing Trees*. The story follows two teenagers, a Greek Cypriot and a Turkish Cypriot, as they fall in love and become separated during the 1970's conflicts between Greek and Turkish factions. A fig tree stands witness to their love and proves a wonderful and remarkably knowledgeable narrator of many of the chapters, imparting her wisdom of the island's history, gossip, local traditions, flora and fauna, and always expressing her love for the island's inhabitants. We recommend this book!



ACTIVITIES

Book Club cont.

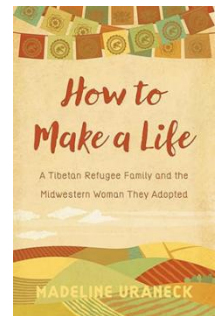
Our book for May is *Fire Weather: a true story from a hotter world* by John Vaillant, a non-fiction study of the 2016 Fort McMurray, Alberta, fire. (2023); 359 pp.



"In May 2016, the city of Fort McMurray in Alberta, Canada, burned to the ground, forcing 88,000 people to flee their homes. It was the largest evacuation ever of a city in the face of a forest fire, raising the curtain on a new age of increasingly destructive wildfires. This book is a suspenseful account of one of North America's most devastating forest fires - and a stark exploration of our dawning era of climate catastrophes" - from the publisher. Several copies are available at the library.

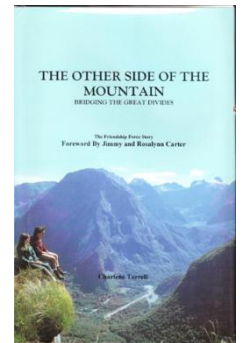
Our plan is to meet at one of the Madison libraries over the summer, and the exact location and time will soon be determined. We are likely to meet either Monday May 18 or Tuesday May 19, at 7:00. An email will be sent to the Book Club email list – or call one of us to get the details.

Our June book is *How to Make a Life: A Tibetan Refugee Family and the Midwestern Woman They Adopted* by Madeline Urunack (2018); 242 pp.



Those who attended the recent FFW-Madison Annual Meeting will remember hearing her speak about her experience working with immigrants and refugees as they settle in Madison.

Finally, in July we are hoping to read *The Other Side of the Mountain: Bridging the Great Divides* by Charlene Terrell (1997). This is a story of Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter and the founding of Friendship Force. We hope to find enough copies to share, as there are none in the library system. Let us know if you have one to share, or if you know where the handful of copies belonging to the club might be stored. Thank you!



Let us know if you would like to be added to the email list for Book Club

Happy reading!

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

ACTIVITIES

**Dining on the 6th
Wednesday
May 6, 2026
9:00 A.M. for
breakfast**



**Luke's Café
5700 US Highway 51,
McFarland, WI 53558**

Take Highway 51 South to McFarland. Turn right on Larson Beach Road at the first stop light coming into town and then left past several businesses to the mall. Or you can turn right on Dale Road at the second stop light and then right to the last business in the strip mall

Luke's Café offers hearty meals with welcoming small town vibes. They have the best breakfasts in McFarland! Their popular dishes are french toast and avocado toast, country skillet and veggie skillet.

The extensive breakfast menu offers burritos, eggs, potatoes and meat, omelettes, eggs benedict, biscuits and gravy, skillet, french toast, pancakes, waffles, and crepes

There is a limited Senior Menu featuring smaller portions for \$8 to \$9. Most meals are \$10 to \$12

To join in this dining adventure of breakfast with other Friendship Force members, register by Monday, May 4, with host Gail Holmes, phone 608 249- 1846 or email glholmes@wisc.edu. Please plan to wear your name tag



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!

ACTIVITIES

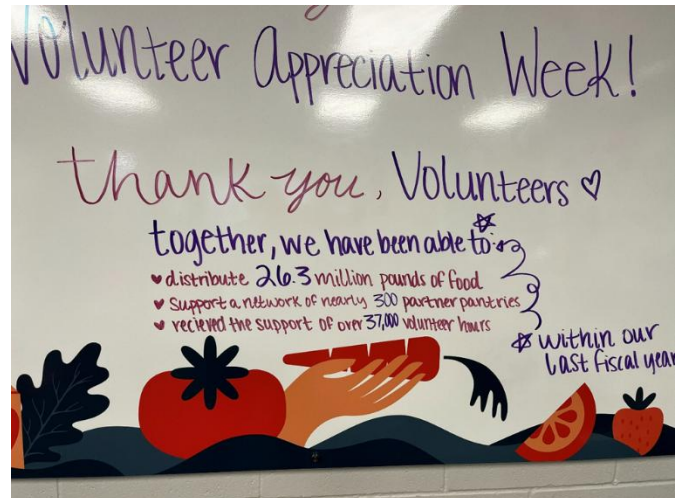


Friendship Force WI-Madison Contributes to Second Harvest Food Bank.

Thanks to Diane Mertens, Larry Neuman, Patrick Fleming, Donna Hussin, Gail Holmes, and Mary Crave for volunteering on April 29. Our next volunteer opportunity is May 27. Watch for the RSVP reminder or email mary.crave@wisc.edu if you'd like to join in.

If you are unable to join us in May these are the remaining dates in 2026:

- June 24
- July 29
- August 26
- September 30
- October 28
- November 18



April 19 – April 25, 2026

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Co-Presidents & FFI Liasons

Diane Mertens (608) 271-8657
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Secretary

Vicki Warren (608) 617-2213
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Treasurer

Deb Gunther (262) 422-0176
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ADDITIONAL BOARD MEMBERS

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Dorothy Baldwin (608) 742-6493
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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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Sandi Wysock (608) 833-5326
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Lise Skofronick ((608) 274-7732)
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Vacant

Program

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Patrick Fleming (pflaming@edgewood.edu)
Margaret Harrigan (margaret.harrigan@wisc.edu)
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Pat Watson (cc2ss@yahoo.com)

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Bike Rides

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Larry Neuman wlneuman@yahoo.com

Book Club

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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
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WISCONSIN FRIENDSHIP FORCE

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