



friendship force
WISCONSIN - MADISON

ffwis.org

June 2026



Wisconsin State Capitol – Madison, WI

CO-PRESIDENTS' MESSAGE

This is our last monthly Co-Presidents' message. As of July 1, we will remain on the board but become "Past Co-Presidents" as Kathy Johnson assumes the position of club President. The past four years, two years as co-vice-presidents and two years as co-presidents, were challenging, exciting, and inspiring for us

When we joined the FFWM board four years ago as Co-Vice Presidents, we were newcomers to Friendship Force and more than a little overwhelmed with the task of leading the club. We knew almost nothing about FFI and had only met a handful of club members. Our initial "deer in the headlights" start was quickly met with warmth and generous help from many experienced club members who guided us and devoted countless hours sustaining club operations, helping us with strategic planning, and moving the club forward. The outpouring of genuine "friendship" humbled us, and we acquired a deep appreciation for the tremendous dedication of time and talent contributed by dozens of club members. We soon recognized how much the success of FFWM, as an all-volunteer organization, depends on the commitment and active participation of each member.

We had repeatedly heard that FFWM is not just a travel club and not only a social club. We learned that it is much more than either – it is a community of caring, open-minded individuals who share a sincere interest in people from cultures across the globe and who are committed to building a better, more peaceful world.

We find it difficult to fully express our gratitude to club officers, board members, Journey Coordinators and Ambassadors, Activity leaders, and veteran club members for their patience, assistance, kindness, diligence, energy and enthusiasm during our tenure. In closing, Diane is reminded of the words of William Shakespeare: "[We] can no other answer make, but, thanks, and thanks" while Larry offers a Japanese expression 心から感謝申し上げます (*Kokoro kara kansha moushiagemasu*) which translates in English as, "I express my gratitude from the bottom of my heart."

With much gratitude,

Diane and Larry

Club Activities Calendar



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

2026

- June 7 Adopt a Highway
- June 10 **Deadline** to order new name badges
- June 21 Invite to Open Doors for Refugees Picnic
- June 24 Second Harvest
- June 29 **Date** Quad Cities Journey Activities Form must be received to participate.
- July 14 Club's Annual Picnic
- July 14-18 Quad Cities Inbound Journey
- July 29 Second Harvest
- August 6 Dining on the 6th
- August 26 Second Harvest
- September 8 Adopt a Highway
- September 20-27 Seferehisar, Türkiye Outbound Journey
- September 30 Second Harvest
- October 11 Adopt a Highway
- October 13-20 Lower Columbia (Washington State) Inbound Journey
- October 28 Second Harvest
- November 18 Second Harvest

2027 Journey Assignments

- May Inbound Birmingham, AL USA
- August Outbound Yogyakarta and Bogor, Indonesia
- September New Hampshire Seacoast, USA



FRIENDSHIP FORCE INTERNATIONAL NEWS

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.

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-EcWzjXQOY6Rne5WbFsVcbA7CctfWHHeSy-Og/edit?_kx=4j7SMbWBJpbKMw6djTVJ1vEQC1LM0m8Ncr39pMtYnM.RaH2Qb&gid=1356194104#gid=13561click94104

(Control + click to follow link)

FFI Announces

50th Anniversary Celebration

Tentatively plans are for Late September or early October 2027.

Mark your calendars for this once in a generation celebration of friendships built over five decades.

Look for an update in the coming months.

Moving Forward: A Message from FFI CEO Jeremi Snook

By Diane Mertens and Larry Neuman

Shortly after the North American Conference in Memphis, FFI CEO Jeremi Snook sent FF club presidents the following message, and it quickly gained the attention of all FF club leaders:

Following our recent conference, we want to share the top-voted ideas from two important working sessions focused on growing US inbound journeys and strengthening our community presence. With nearly 1/3 to 1/2 of all Friendship Force members in the US, and inbound requests at an unprecedented low, mobilizing clubs around these priorities has never been more critical.

Below are the Top 4 ideas generated by those attending the North American Conference to encourage International Journeys:

- (1) **Personal Invitations** — Clubs should send club-to-club letters and individual invitations (including Zoom calls) to people who have previously hosted your club. Remind recipients of the Friendship Force philosophy and our mission of building global unity.
- (2) **Themed Journeys** — Develop themed and family journeys that leverage unique American attractions (national parks, space exploration, etc.). Consider regional tours with multiple clubs. Every themed journey must include a service project component.
- (3) **Inbound Discounts** — Offer fee discounts for inbound groups at both the club and FFI levels to reduce financial barriers.
- (4) **Visa & Entry Clarity** — Provide clear, accessible information on US visa requirements and offer letters of invitation to help prospective guests navigate the process of getting to the US.

Other ideas regarding journeys that generated interest at the conference included the following:

- Reunion Journeys
- Neighboring Journeys (with Canada or Mexico)
- Highlight small-town America as a destination
- All clubs to list profiles and journeys on the FFI website catalog
- Form a club-level committee to oversee implementation of these initiatives
- Host weekly country-focused Zoom calls to generate journey interest

Below are the Top 3 ideas generated at the conference to increase local public awareness and partnerships:

- (1) **Training on Building Local Partnerships** ---FFI will develop training resources to help clubs identify partners, communicate mutual benefit, and sustain those relationships
- (2) **Designate One Community Engagement Lead** — Every club should identify one person responsible for all local community engagement events and communication

FRIENDSHIP FORCE INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Moving Forward: A Message cont.

- (3) **Establish One New Partnership** — Each club should reach out to and formalize a relationship with at least one local organization in 2027 (cultural groups, Rotary, schools with exchange students, nonprofits serving diverse communities, etc.).

THE ONE THING FOR 2027: If clubs do nothing else this year, we ask this: ****Become more visible in your community.** **** Think about what your club can uniquely offer** — videos about your area, presentations, partnerships, stories — and share them. The world needs to see what Friendship Force members are doing every day to build global unity.

These ideas are a real opportunity to reinvigorate Friendship Force in the coming years, and they provide our club with a future direction. After reviewing the ideas, the FFWM board began a discussion on how to prioritize and incorporate them into our club's strategic plan. The board is at the earliest stage of turning such general ideas into concrete steps and specific activities. It welcomes input from all club members about innovative ways we can put these ideas into action while building on our club's history and resources, the interests and talents of our members, and the locational advantages of the Madison metro region.

The Latest Travel News for Europe's Schengen Zone

US Travelers to Europe beginning in Q4 2026 will need a new travel authorization (ETIAS) to visit any of the countries in Europe's Schengen Zone. ETIAS stands for European Travel Information and Authorization System. The European Union (EU) is introducing this new system to improve border control.

Once it is operational, the ETIAS travel authorization is digitally linked to your passport and is valid for up to three years or until your passport expires, whichever comes first. You apply online prior to your trip and pay €20 (free for applicants below 18 and above 70 years old.) More information can be found at ETIAS.com.

Initially, there will be a six-month transitional period during which travelers are encouraged to apply for ETIAS authorization. During this time, if you meet all other entry conditions, you won't be refused entry solely for not having an ETIAS.

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CLUB NEWS

New Name Badge with New Colored Logo Opportunity

The opportunity has presented itself to order plastic name badges for our members. There is a \$30.00 minimum order so we will need to order at least 4 badges. Below is a photo. The badge would have the updated FFI logo and would contain our club name as well as your name. These are more durable than the plastic sleeve convention style badges that we have issued to new members during recent years. The cost is \$8.50 per badge. If you are interested in purchasing a badge, please send an email to me at sandrawysock@msn.com with the following information by June 10:

Your name as you would like it to appear on the badge

The type of badge you prefer, magnet style, bulldog clip style or pin back.

Our club will cover the handling and shipping costs. You can pay me when we deliver the badges. Assuming we have at least 4 orders, I hope to complete the order and have the badges ready to deliver to you at our club picnic July 14.

Sandi Wysock

EXAMPLE



SAVE THE DATE!

Club Annual Picnic

July 14, 2026

Huegel-Jamestown Park

5810 Williamsburg Way, Madison, WI



Community Picnic June 21, 2026

Open Doors for Refugees invites us to join them for a potluck picnic at Elver Park in Madison on Sunday, June 21, 2026, from 12:00-3:00 PM. This free community event will feature family-friendly activities, delicious food, and live music by Tani Diakite and the Afrofunkstars, Cumbia Cachaca, and Gloria Hays.

This is a great opportunity for resettled refugees and long-term Madison residents to come together and build community. Read more about what we've got planned on our website.

There are lots of ways you can contribute to this annual celebration.

- RSVP on our Facebook page and share the event with your network.
- Bring a food dish to share! No signup needed., but feel free to get in touch if you have any questions: picnic@odfr.org
- Volunteer your time! We need lots of help with setup, cleanup, leading kids' activities and more. Sign up to help.



JOURNEY NEWS

The September Journey to **Seferihisar, Türkiye** is scheduled for September 20-27. There is still room for additional ambassadors. Contact Journey Co-Coordinator Maureen Kind and Margaret Harrigan ASAP if interested. Additional post-journey activities are being explored.

2026 Inbound Journeys

July 14-18 – The final plans for hosting the **Quad Cities Iowa** Friendship Force Club are nearing completion. Ten Ambassadors 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 in Fitchburg.

We are still in need of additional home hosts, dinner hosts and day hosts. Please contact George Wysock or Kathy Speck if you can lend a hand with hosting. A meeting for all hosts is scheduled for June 22 via Zoom.

2026 Inbound Journeys cont.

Members are invited to participate in numerous activities with the visiting ambassadors. Following the welcome picnic, many fun and interesting activities are planned including: tours of International Crane Foundation and New Life Lavender and Cherry Farm in Baraboo; Olbrich Gardens, Downtown Farmers' Market, WI State Capitol and Overture Center; a pontoon boat ride on Lake Mendota and farewell dinner at Maple Bluff Country Club. **To participate, complete the sign-up sheet posted Saturday, June 13, 2026 as a stand alone form and mail with your payment to Diane Mertens, 2935 Forest Down, Fitchburg, WI 53711. It must be received by Monday, June 29, to be included in the meal count for the farewell dinner.**

October 13-20 – Our club will host **Lower Columbia Washington** October 13-20, 2026. Ten to fourteen ambassadors are expected. Members Lola Barrientos Marquez, Faith Lerner, Vivian Norton, and Hank Weiss are serving on the planning committee led by Journey Coordinators Tom and Donna Miller and assisted by Mike Di Iorio, Journey Treasurer. Recruitment is underway for volunteers to serve as home hosts, day hosts, and dinner hosts.

Journeys for 2027

FFI has notified us of three journey matches for 2027. One domestic inbound, one domestic outbound, and one international outbound to two different clubs. Dates will be determined in consultation with the host clubs, so may vary from suggested dates below.

Inbound: Birmingham, USA, suggested for May 2027. They hosted our club in Fall 2025.

Outbound: Yogyakarta and Bogor, Indonesia suggested for August 2027.

The Bogor club is a small club in the 6th largest township of Jakarta metropolitan area, and the 14th nationwide. The town covers an area of about 46 square miles, with a population exceeding one million. Bogor is considered an important economic, scientific, cultural and tourist center, as well as a mountain resort.

The Yogyakarta Club is another small club located on the Indonesian island of Java. With a population numbering approximately 375,000, the city is known for its traditional arts and cultural heritage.

New Hampshire Seacoast, USA, suggested for September 2027.

ACTIVITIES

Adopt a Highway Clean Up Sunday, June 7, 6-8 pm

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**. The weather currently is looking good showing temperatures in the 60s. We hope to see you there.



These are the dates for the rest of 2026:

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

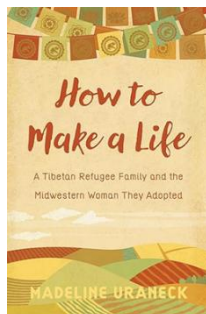
Please contact Stephanie Vanden Bush (sljacobs2@gmail.com or 920-676-1441) to commit or with questions



Book Club

On May 19, five members of the book club met at the Pinney Library for an interesting discussion of John Vaillant's best-selling book *Fire Weather* about the May 2016 Fort McMurray, Alberta fire - a true account of the event. "In May 2016, Fort McMurray, the hub of Canada's oil industry and America's biggest foreign supplier was overrun by wildfire. The multi-billion-dollar disaster melted vehicles, turned entire neighborhoods into firebombs, and drove 88,000 people from their homes in a single afternoon. Through the lens of this apocalyptic conflagration – the wildfire equivalent to Hurricane Katrina – John Vaillant warns that this was not a unique event but a shocking preview of what we must prepare for in a hotter, more flammable world." – from the book jacket. Our discussion centered around the fire probabilities here in our own country and even our state as the weather becomes warmer and drier.

Our book for June is *How to Make a Life: A Tibetan Refugee Family and the Midwestern Woman They Adopted* by Madeline Uraneck (2018). 13 copies are available through the library currently.

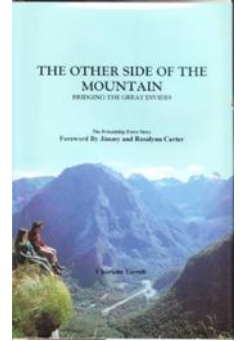


Those who attended the recent FFWM Annual Meeting will remember hearing this author speak about her experience working with immigrants and refugees as they settle in Madison.

ACTIVITIES

Book Club cont.

Then for July we are excited to offer *The Other Side of the Mountain: Bridging the Great Divide* by Charlene Terrell (1997).



This is a story of Jimmy and Roselynn Carter and the founding of Friendship Force. The library has no copies of this book in its collection. However, Donna Hussin purchased and donated several copies, and we have a couple more to share just get in touch with one of us and we will get a book to you. It seems a good time to remember how Friendship Force got started, and about the important goals that it represents. Please join us in this endeavor!

Upcoming meetings:

How to Make a Life

Tuesday, June 16, 7:00 pm

Sequoia Library, Study Rooms 104 and 105, combined

The Other Side of the Mountain

Tuesday, July 21, 7:00 pm

Location TBD

Our plan is to meet in person on the third Tuesdays at one of the Madison libraries over the summer. In the fall we are likely to move back to Monday, and at some point, we might return to zoom. Summer is a great time to get together in person, and we hope to see you at a meeting. Completion of the book is never required!

Happy reading!

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

How do members not participating in Book Club request a copy to read?

Copies of the *Other Side of the Mountain: Bridging the Great Divide* by Charlene Terrell (1997) are available to any member beginning in August 2026.

The loan period is 30 days.

Contact the Membership Committee Chair, Lise Skofronick, liskofronick@gmail.com,

ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITIES

**Dining on the 6th
Thursday
August 6, 2026
12:00 noon for Lunch**



**Meze Mediterranean Grill,
503 West Main Street
Sun Prairie, WI**

The Meze Mediterranean Grill, 503 West Main Street, Sun Prairie, WI is booked for lunch on August 6, 2026. The menu is Turkish and it should be a good orientation to the cuisine for our ambassadors going to Turkey in September. Figo Akey, the chef and owner, has agreed to come to the table that day and explain the menu to our guests and to answer any questions they may have.

More details will be included in the July newsletter. In the meantime, call me if you have any questions or suggestions on how we can make this experience an enjoyable one.

Patrick Fleming, (608) 249-5992

**Dining on the 6th
is not being offered in
June or July.**

*JUST A LITTLE
Reminder*

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!



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

As the school year comes to a close, thousands of children throughout southcentral Wisconsin will lose access to free or reduced cost school lunches, and sometimes breakfasts. Food pantries fill the gaps for many families. On May 27, seven of our club members, Larry Neuman, Diane Mertens, Vivian Norton, Donna Hussin, Gail Holmes, Matt Gazo and Deb Gunther bagged five pounds of grade B apples from an orchard into net bags with 25 pounds per box. Grade A apples are perfect and sold in stores while grade B have minor blemishes.

The volunteers from Amazon were in the other sterile room and measured out multigrain flour into bags. It is also interesting to know that Second Harvest purchases unsold produce directly from vendors at local farmers' markets and delivers it to pantries within hours to ensure families receive food at peak freshness.

Our next opportunity to volunteer at Second Harvest Food Bank at 2802 Dairy Drive is Wednesday, June 24, from 12:30 to 3:30 p.m. Please let Mary Crave (mary.crave@wisc.edu) know by Monday, June 22, if you'd like to help out.

If you are unable to join us in June or July these are the remaining dates in 2026:

July 29
August 26
September 30
October 28
November 18



**Friendship Force
International**
Building Global Unity

Friendship is defined by the words we use, the actions we take, and the commitments we all make every day to advocate for peace through friendship.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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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

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WISCONSIN FRIENDSHIP FORCE

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