

FRIENDSHIP FORCE OF CENTRAL ARIZONA

NEWSLETTER - December 2025

2025 BOARD OF DIRECTORS OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS

President Nancy Mueller - 608-838-3575

Vice President - Maggie Wittenberg
623-688-4245

Treasurer - Ruth Noble 602-920-8680

Secretary - Chris Kastella 208-691-4610

Journey Coordinator - Richard Mueller

Membership - Maggie Wittenberg

Newsletter - Nancy Unferth nferth@aol.com

Website - Bill Kram

Activities - Pat Forsythe



President's message

Our club celebrated Thanksgiving with the Thailand inbound journey. Before the evening ended we asked everyone to list an item for which they were thankful. No surprise, the top of the list was family,

friends, the ability to travel, meeting new friends. It reinforces the mission of FFI.

When I think of my circle of friends in Arizona and Madison, a number of those relationships are because of FFI. We have traveled together, worked on projects together, and found a purpose larger than ourselves - promoting global citizenry, the idea that my identity and responsibility extend to a worldwide community.

There is a financial urgency for FFI to continue. The organization has adapted over the last years by moving its office, lessening staff, using more part time employees, seeking volunteers. FFI is making a worldwide effort to expand membership, build new clubs, and offer innovative journeys.

In order to continue the stability of FFI, a critical piece is the increase in dues. In March 2016 FFCAZ club dues were \$25. In 2025 our club dues of \$40 was \$30 for FFI

and \$10 for the club. FFI dues for 2026 will increase to \$100 (\$8.33 per month) and club dues will remain at \$10 for the year. The increase for FFI seems like a jump from last year but dues increases did not happen over the decade while expenses did.

At our January meeting I will show the FFI video, answer questions, and provide an overview of the FFI website so you can see all the journeys and resources FFI offers, show the portal, and help you make the payment through the portal. We will take payments for our club dues of \$10 check / cash, credit card for FFI.

Remember HUGS – Help Us Grow Stronger

Our club has much to offer and with your help FFI and FFCAZ will remain strong. Thanks to all.

HOLIDAY PARTY

December 4th at 4:30

**Friendship Holiday Party and Annual Meeting
Kuntz Recreation Center, Room 3, 14401 R.H.
Johnson Blvd., Sun City West**

4:30 before dinner, we will have a short business meeting including voting on the 2026 officers and announcing plans for 2026.

Dinner Menu – Chicken Cordon Bleu, scalloped potatoes, asparagus, rolls, salad, dessert, tea, lemonade. \$12.50 Contact Maggie 623-688-4245.

Bring a wrapped unused memento from one of your travels as a gift. Maybe a t-shirt, a travel journal or a tea-towel. We will play “Thieves Christmas”, a gift exchange with a twist.

Be present for the drawing of a 3 day/2 night getaway to Lake Havasu. Our Friendship Force friend Carolyn suggests February 12-15 for the Winter Fireworks show. You will be her guest(s), with private bedroom and bath. 1 queen-size bed.

Enjoy the performing duo, local musicians Darlene on bass and Steve on guitar. The Kehlers have entertained from festivals to libraries. You'll want to sing along to their variety of songs.



Claudia shows the milkweed the butterflies love.

Garden and Butterfly Exploration

We meandered through Claudia's Pollinator Pathway Garden on November 12 and saw a variety of blooming flowers and trees. The desert plants provide nectar sources for many insects, birds, moths and butterflies. We learned to tell the difference between the queens and the monarchs, now know why butterflies are on the ground in the morning (it's too cold to fly), and realize we too can easily have a few potted plants in our yards to help save the butterflies. Claudia loves to bake so she provided desserts for us.



**Those who plant a
garden
plant happiness.**

COMING EVENTS

December 9 at 9:00 am

Labyrinth Walk at The Church of the Palms, 14808 N. Boswell Ave., Sun City.

A labyrinth is a single, winding path that leads to a center and is designed for walking meditation. Participate in a peaceful walk and take a quiet break during the rush of the holiday season. Learn the history of labyrinths and walk two labyrinths in Sun City with guide Judy Rainforth.

January 4, 4:00 Kuntz Recreation Center, Room 3, 14401 R.H. Johnson Blvd., Sun City West

Potluck with Meatball cookoff – Bring your favorites – sign up with Diane Spiger 435-279-3687

Presentation on FFI fees and registration on site.

Thursday January 8, 2026 1:00

Milk is the Star of Our Story

40034 W Clayton Road, Stanfield AZ

Take a farm tour at Shamrock Farms, 10,000 much-loved cows, state-of-the-art technology. Everyone who makes milk has got a farm, but few have the buzz and energy of ours. And we can't wait to show you the difference in everything we do. At our family-owned farms, we use the latest technology to bottle our milk fresh, faster and tastier. We're passionate about purity. That's why we use light processing and never use growth hormones. \$10 per person. Carpooling. Meet at Sun City Bell library at 10:00. \$4 lunch on site. RSVP Laura Isaacs 440-668-9501

FF Central Arizona Club Members Tucson Exploration

February 25-27, 2026 with 2 overnights, rodeo, parade, tour of Dove of the Desert, limited to 16, approximately \$250 pp.



Thailand Inbound Journey

October 29-November 5, 2025

Bonny Yamashita, Journey Host Coordinator

For anyone who did not join our fun, fast and interesting (FFI) exchange with Thailand, these are a few of the things you missed.

First off was our welcome party potluck, Kuentz Recreation Center.



This is a great place to thank everyone for the variety of food during the exchange. After eating our fill the Native American Flute Club entertained us with lovely music and the history of the flute.

The next day the Ambassadors were treated to a taste of retirement in the US and especially the Sun Cities.



Tour of Sun City Museum by Thai and Central AZ members.



Lunch at Lakeview followed by miniature golf.



Touring one of the many craft clubs in the Sun City Recreation centers.

After a tour of Banner's Sun Health Research Institute, we were off to the Surprise Police Department for a look at what they do day to day.



New cop Nora. Very long commute.

The fun didn't stop there. We went to a Trunk and Treat at Dysart Community Center, where we enjoyed seeing children in their Halloween best. You would think that's enough for a day but we were off to Chris Kastella's home for a full Thanksgiving dinner – turkey, mashed potatoes and gravy, stuffing, pumpkin pie.

Friday started with a tour of the Surprise Firehouse 301. There they not only told us what truly happens at a firehouse but brought out the fire engine as a training exercise to show us how they take out the hoses and fight a fire. They even practiced taking down a door and getting their hoses around obstacles.



From there we went to Poppy's house to enjoy her pool and have a chili lunch. There were games to play and lots to eat.



Wild west meets Halloween for the Thais.

We couldn't stay long there as we had a concert to attend. We enjoyed the Halloween concert featuring Don Reed and Nicole Pesce who spontaneously played a Thai song as part of the performance.

The next day the Ambassadors spent the day with their hosts. Some traveled as far away as the Grand Canyon and some toured this area going to the MIM and the Heard Museum.

Sunday took us to a walk in the White Tanks with Richard Mueller as the tour guide. After that some went the POW WOW but all returned back for dinner at The Longhorn Steak House. Hosting our

guests was Julie Soske, a long time Hollywood resident.

The next day we all turned out for a fun filled lesson in country western line dancing. Then it was off to the market to buy food for our Thailand dinner and dance put on by our Ambassadors. We sang and danced under the almost full moon with our belly's full of Thai and Green Bay Packer tailgate food.



Our last day together was spent in Wickenburg going to the Caballeros Western Museum and exploring the area.



That night was our 4X4 at Don Ruben's, where we said our good byes, asking each Ambassador what was the highlight of their Arizona tour and what we could have done to make it better. These new found Arizonians gave the trip a Thumbs up!



Two Cents Worth from Treasurer:

So says Auntie Acid: "I wish Santa would publish his naughty list. What a great way to meet people." LOL Ruth

The Friendship Force of Central Arizona

Treasurer Report Ending: November 24, 2025

Chase Bank Club Account

April 2, 2025

Beginning Balance \$9,820.77

Income: \$80 (dues)

Disbursement: \$5683.81

(Antelope Canyon)

November 24, 2025

Ending Balance: \$4,216.96

Chase Bank Journey Account:

April 2, 2025

Beginning Balance: \$2,162.48

Income: \$4840 (N Colorado)

Disbursement: \$3850 (N Colorado)

November 24, 2025

Ending Balance \$3,152.48



Arizona Christmas Tree

Friendship Force of Central Arizona

12 months in review December 2024 – November 2025



Thanks to all the members who Helped Us Grow Stronger throughout this last year. Your participation was critical in these successful outcomes:

- *2024 Holiday party for club with Christmas musical program, sit down dinner and entertainment from our Canadian friends.
- *Updated FFCAZ by-laws
- *FFCAZ Membership Roster recreated
- *FFCAZ badges ordered for group
- *Club website upgraded
- *Business FFCAZ cards created for recruiting
- *New Club Banner for identification
- *Club Tour – Vulture City and lunch at Rancho de Los Caballeros
- *Club Tour – Merci Train
- *4x4 held at international restaurants - Hanging Gardens, A to Z Polish and German Grocery, Real Thai and Suchi, Bilbianos, picnics, Don Ruben's Mexican
- *Club travel to Antelope Canyon – 18 travelers, 3 days 2 overnights
- *National Capital Area inbound cancelled
- *Outbound Journey to Northern Colorado June 2025
- *Inbound from Thailand November 2025 – 6 ambassadors, 9 hosts
- *2025 Holiday party for club with sit down dinner and entertainment
- *11 new or renewed lapsed members

November 4x4 General Meeting

This was held at Don Ruben's with 25 attending. This was also the farewell for our recent Thai inbound journey. President Nancy Mueller thanked all the hosts, all the planners, drivers and food providers. The two journey coordinators, Pong Niyomca as ambassador coordinator and Bonny Yamashita as host coordinator were exceptionally capable and skilled in making this journey a success.

Announcements were made about the garden and butterfly exploration, the holiday party, the labyrinth walk, and the journey to Stratford and St. Mary's, Ontario Canada in late April/early May 2026. Members were reminded that they could self-nominate for officer positions. Elections will be held at the Holiday Party.

2026 Friendship Force of Central Arizona Officers Nominating Committee - Chris Kastella, Maggie Wittenberg, Richard Mueller

These are the nominations for 2026

President – Nancy Mueller

Vice President – Maggie Wittenberg

Secretary – Diane Spiger

Treasurer – Ruth Noble

Journey Coordinator – Richard Mueller

Membership – Maggie Wittenberg

Newsletter – Nancy Unferth and Chris Kastella

Activities – Pat Forsythe and Laura Isaacs

Website – Bill Kram

Travel possibilities 2026

April 2026 - FF Central Arizona club members Native American exploration

April 24-27 FFI N. America Conference, Memphis

April 28-May 6, 2026 Festival on the Mississippi River Cruise with FFI

May 6-May 10, 2026 New Orleans tour with FFI

April /May 2026 Central Arizona outbound to FF Stratford-St. Mary's, Canada – Richard Mueller ambassador coordinator

November 2026 Inbound from Friendship Force Kansas - Sue LaVacque and Shirley Schwartz - host coordinators.

Richard Mueller is exploring spring in southern Canada, Stratford and St. Mary's Ontario, home of the Shakespeare Festival. The clubs often tour the Toyota car factory, visit a robotics lab, and visit Doon Pioneer Village. A second week in Montreal or Quebec City is being investigated. A few days in Toronto might be added on if there is interest.



Stratford is a Wonderful Place to Visit
By Nancy and Bob Unferth

My family and I have been visiting Stratford for more than 30 years, and it's always exciting. The town is best known as the home of one of North America's preeminent repertory theatre companies—more on that in a moment. For planning purposes, average high temperatures are about 52°F in April and 66°F in May.

Stratford sits along the Avon River, just like its namesake, Stratford-upon-Avon in England (the English were never famous for creative place-naming). The river is home to graceful swans, descended from a pair gifted by Queen Elizabeth II. A stroll along the river is just lovely, and you'll find boat rentals and river tours available as well.

The surrounding region of Ontario includes a substantial Mennonite community. From Stratford, it's only a half-hour drive to the small Mennonite town of Milbank, where you can enjoy a very good, very plain Mennonite lunch—and get a glimpse into Mennonite culture and daily life.

The town of Stratford itself has plenty to offer: historical sites, gardens, a large variety of shops and restaurants, hiking trails, the Cat Café, and much more.

Stratford's main attraction, of course, is the Stratford Festival—the largest repertory theatre company in Canada, one of the largest in North America, and one of the best. In 2026, the Festival will stage 12 productions across four venues, with performances running Tuesday through Sunday beginning at the end of April. Productions include *The Hobbit*, *Guys & Dolls*, *The Tempest*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*...

During the season you can take Backstage tours, Warehouse Tours, and Changeover Experiences. The program starts April 21, but it has more shows in May.

Friendship Force of Central Arizona 2026 Future Possibilities

Connect with some of the 11 Sister Cities to Phoenix – Calgary, Canada; Catania, Italy; Chengdu, China; Ennis, Ireland; Grenoble, France; Hermosillo, Mexico; Himeji, Japan; Prague, Czech Republic; Ramat-Gan, Israel; Suwon, South Korea; Taipei, Taiwan

Marketing in West Valley – print media, Lifelong Learning, Rotary Club,

New members – find those in West Valley that are members in other states

Update Website – more photos, more activities highlighted

Continue 4x4s January to May, October, November, December

Travel within Pacific FFI region – Tucson & CA

Host through FFI special journeys

Outbound Journey to Canada

Inbound Journey from Kansas

Native American education programs with trip to reservation

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Pat Forsythe was "Know Your Neighbor" in the October 29, 2025 issue of the Sun City Independent. She and Al are long time members of FFI. They love to travel because it allows them to experience different cultures. In April 2025 they led our club in exploring Antelope Canyon. In 2018 they led "Walk in Their Shoes", a 12-day bus tour to explore the American Indian and Spanish Influence in the Southwest. They have planned many other activities for our club.



Thai visitors find friendship in Sun City

By Zev Black
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

"It wasn't an activity, but it was the welcome that every one of these different groups gave," Nancy Mueller, president of Friendship Force Central Arizona, said about the biggest highlight of the week.

The Friendship Force visit from Thailand has come to an end, and while memories were made, it is the camaraderie that many of the members are taking home with them.

One of Friendship Force International's main philosophies is "faces not places," meaning the fellowship that was formed over the weeklong trip is more important than the museums, hikes and tours that they go on.

"We love to see people," Pong Niyomca, one of the Thai members, said. "We don't care where we are. We don't care what we see. People are the main thing."

Niyomca came to Arizona around 20 years ago when she brought a group of Thai students

to the United States. However, they were only in Phoenix for one night and she wasn't able to see much. This time around, she was able to really soak in the clean sky, broad landscapes and the cacti that she loves.

Some other highlights of the week included the welcome party on the first night, the Musical Instrument Museum, the Heard Museum and tours of the police and fire departments.

Niyomca said that her friends back home would want to know everything about the visit because she doesn't think that any of them have been to Arizona. She especially wants to share what it's like to live in a smaller community.

"As time went by, we've learned that this is the place that we should be," she said. "Not in the big city, but in a smaller community. We don't have a retirement community in Thailand. This gives us a very good example. I will bring this idea and tell the people back at home that we should really have it organized back at home."

Mueller said that an invitation to go to Thailand has repeatedly been given to the American hosts.

"It's that relationship building," she said. "Friendship Force International calls it citizen diplomacy, and that's exactly what we're seeing here."

To learn more about Friendship Force and its mission, go to ffcenaz.com and friendshipforce.org.

November 12, 2025
Sun City Independent