

**FRIENDSHIP FORCE OF
CENTRAL ARIZONA
NEWSLETTER
November 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

**Thailand Friendship Force Club to
Central Arizona Friendship Force Club
October 29 - November 5, 2025**

The group of 6 Ambassadors from Thailand will be arriving soon!! Plans and reservations have been made and we await their arrival eagerly!! Thank you to **Bonny Yamashita, Host Coordinator for all your efforts on our behalf!**

See the schedule on next page



President's message

Why is Friendship Force important to me? FFI began in 1977. My husband, Richard, and I have been involved since the 1980s when Richard's parents traveled on one of the earliest journeys

with the Madison, Wisconsin club. We hosted a couple from Gelsenkirchen Germany while the Wisconsin group of more than 150 visited there. Since then we have traveled or hosted more than 25 times. We are hooked on this style of travel – meeting people in their community, making friends around the table, experiencing the daily activities of those hosting us. We prefer the immersion into their

culture compared to the aloofness and distance of a large group tour. Friendship Force has given us friends around the world. We read and listen to the global news differently. We see the humanity when we travel and we are global citizens as we engage with people in other countries to promote mutual understanding. Friendship, humanity, and global citizenry have been and are still the keystones of Friendship Force International.

Change – the keystones will stay the same while FFI begins implementing a new global membership dues structure that is fair, inclusive and is a strategic investment in FFI's future. In 2026, the US membership dues for FFI will increase to \$100. There is a financial urgency since travel has decreased for journeys and the US is the largest membership base. New dues rates will be determined for other countries recognizing the diverse economic conditions of international members. As comparisons for the current membership fee, in Thailand, and Chiapas Mexico it takes 3-4 days to earn \$40. The Arizona minimum wage of \$15 means in 3 hours a worker earns \$45.

I will be forwarding a video and several documents to all FFCAZ members with recent messages from FFI that explain the Membership for All: A Global Equity Initiative. The new procedures will mean changes in the way we collect dues. A new membership payment computerized process at FFI will be live to all members in the US on January 1, 2026.

After watching the video and reading the materials, contact me with questions at events or by phone.

2025 4X4 CALENDAR

November 4 – 4pm Don Rueben's Mexican Food, 11340 West Bell Road, Surprise RSVP Diane Spiger 435-279-3687. This is the farewell for the Thai inbound journey.

Thursday December 4 - 4:30 (note time)– Holiday Party, Kuntz Recreation Center, Room 3, 14401 R.H. Johnson Blvd., Sun City West, dinner \$12.50, gift exchange, music.

Thailand Friendship Force Club to Central Arizona Friendship Force Club
October 29 - November 5, 2025 Activities
Contact Bonny (310.341.4252) if you have questions – many changes have been made since the October newsletter.

Oct 29, Wednesday

4:30 PM . Welcome Party Potluck, Kuentz Recreation Center, 14401 RH Johnson Blvd, Sun City West, Kiva Room #5. Chicken will be provided. Place settings and water and non-alcoholic beverages provided. **\$5** per person for non-ambassadors.

Oct 30, Thursday

9:00 Pat Forsythe is the Day Leader. Meet at the Marinette Rec Center of Sun City Entrance, 9860 W Union Hills Dr, Sun City.” Sun City Adventure tour.” We will explore the history of the Sun Cities, visit the recreation centers, and see what is available in a retirement community.

11:30 Sun City Museum tour, 10801 W Oakmont Drive, Sun City

Lunch - Sack lunch meal at Lakeview Recreation Center

2:30 Banner Sun Health Research Institute, 10515 W Santa Fe Drive, Sun City MUST HAVE CLOSED TOED SHOES. Research specializes in Alzheimer’s disease and dementia and movement disorders including Parkinson’s disease and Huntington’s disease.

4:00 City of Surprise Police Department, 14250 W Statler Plaza, Surprise

6:30 Thanksgiving meal at Chris Kastella’s home, Paradise RV Park, 10950 W. Union Hills, 1248, Sun City. Bring place setting for host and ambassadors. Water and non-alcoholic beverages provided. Menu: turkey, dressing, mashed potatoes, green bean casserole, pumpkin pie.

Oct 31, Friday

10:00 Tour of Fire House, 301 in Surprise, 16750 N Village Dr E, Surprise, AZ Free MUST HAVE CLOSED TOED SHOES.

11:30 Back yard party and meal at Poppy’s “Resort” with swimming pool available. 10524 W Bellarose Dr, Sun City, AZ. This event is free. Place settings and water and non-alcoholic beverages provided.

4:00 Halloween Concert with Don Reed on trumpet and Nicole Pesce on piano. Desert Palms Presbyterian Church, 13459 W Stardust Blvd., Sun City West. donation

Nov 1, Saturday

This day is with the hosts and guests.

Option: **Heard Museum** – American Indian Art and Culture, 2301 N. Central Ave, Phoenix. open daily, 104, free public tours 10:30, noon, 1:00, 2:30. Adults \$26

Option: **Musical Instrument Museum** – world’s only global collection, 4725 E Mayo Blvd, Phoenix, open daily 9-5, adults \$20

Option: 3 ambassadors visit **Phoenix Zoo**, 455 N Galvin Parkway, Phoenix as guests of Mary Rubert, FF Central AZ member. Other adults \$39.95 open daily 9-4

Option: 37th Annual Red Mountain Eagle **Pow Wow** – gathering of Native Americans for dances, singing, celebration. Salt River Baseball Field, 1839 N Longmore Road, Scottsdale. Gourd dancing 10:00 November 1 and 2; Grand Entries 1:00 November 1 and 2, dancing and drumming all day. Free

Option Nov 2 only: **Day of the Dead Festival** - Mariachi, ballet folklorico, live music, food trucks, car show, artisan market. St. Mary’s Basilica, 231 N 3rd St., Phoenix 11am-5 pm. Bring a non-perishable food for St. Vincent de Paul Food Bank.

Nov 2, Sunday

8:30 Richard Mueller – morning leader. Meet at White Tank Library, 20304 W White Tank Mountain Rd, Waddell. MUST HAVE CLOSED TOED WALKING SHOES.

9:00 – 10:30 Walk the waterfall trail at White Tank Mountain Regional Park to see petroglyphs and native plants.

5:00 Dinner at The Longhorn Steak House, 14127 W. Bell Road, Surprise. Ambassadors are guests of Julie Soske. All others pay for your meals. Julie was a long time Hollywood resident, worked at some of the biggest studios and was well known at the Polo Lounge. Ask her anything about the movie stars.

Nov 3, Monday

10:00-11:00 Line dancing with Randi Henk, instructor. Palm Ridge Rec Center, Summit Hall, 13800 W Deer Valley Dr., Sun City West. Guests may show us Thai dancing. Free to attendees.

Nov 4, Tuesday

10:00 Desert Caballeros Western Museum – recreation of early western town street and shops, Western fine art, 21 N Frontier St., Wickenburg. Adults **\$16**

Walking tour to see the bronze sculptures and murals that showcase the history of Wickenburg.

Lunch at the Cowboy Cooking restaurant.

4:00 Farewell. Ambassadors join our Friendship Force of Central Arizona monthly gathering - 4X4 at Don Ruben's Mexican Food, 11340 W Bell Road, Suite 125, Surprise, AZ 85378. CONTACT DIANE SPIGER to make your reservation – 435-279-3687 or dianefrancom@gmail.com

Nov 5, Wednesday

Ambassadors leave.

HOLIDAY PARTY

December 4th at 4:30

Friendship Holiday Party and Annual Meeting

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

Dinner Menu – Chicken Cordon Bleu, scalloped potatoes, asparagus, rolls, salad, dessert, tea, lemonade.

Go 50/50 with The FF Club of Central Arizona. The club will pay half the dinner cost of \$25. Member's half is \$12.50. RSVP Maggie Wittenberg – 623-688-4245. Send a check to Friendship Force of Central Arizona (Maggie Wittenberg, 13330 W Laterraza Dr, Sun City West, AZ 85375) by **November 24**.

Bring a wrapped unused memento from one of your travels as a gift. Maybe a t-shirt, a travel journal or a tea-towel. (see photo example). If you don't have an item on your shelf bring something you've bought locally with the name of a state on it e.g. a can of Georgia peaches. We will play "Thieves Christmas", a gift exchange with a twist.

Entertainment is the performing duo local musicians Darlene and Steve Kehler.



Advice from a Garden

Cultivate lasting friendships

Sow Seeds of kindness

Listen to sage advice

Don't let the little things bug you

Be outstanding in your field

Take thyme for yourself.

(from Your True Nature Inc.)

November 12 at 10:00-to 11:30

Garden and Butterfly Exploration

Join Claudia for a peaceful walk through her Pollinator Pathway Garden certified for Maricopa County. This is pesticide-free garden in a connected corridor for pollinating insects and birds. She is also a part of the Southwest Monarch Study for a national database. Claudia nurtures a variety of desert plants that bloom sequentially to provide consistent nectar sources necessary for the monarch and queen butterflies to survive on their travels. Walk through this beautiful backyard garden and find out what flowers and trees survive better in a low desert climate. Learn how to identify male and female queen and monarch butterflies.

Carpooling is suggested. Claudia's address is 9856 W. Oraibi Drive, Peoria. RSVP by November 6 to Nancy Mueller 608-838-3575.

December 9 at 9:00 am

Labyrinth Walk

Participate in a peaceful walk and take a quiet break during the rush of the holiday season. Learn the history of labyrinths by walking two labyrinths in Sun City with Judy Rainforth as our guide. Meet at The Church of the Palms, 14808 N. Boswell Ave., Sun City.

Travel possibilities for 2026

February 26-28 Tucson Rodeo and Parade

April 2026 - FF Central Arizona club members

Native American exploration

April 24-27, 2026 FFI North 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

May 2026 Central Arizona outbound to FF Stratford-St. Mary's, Canada and FF Western Michigan for the tulip festival. Ambassador coordinator needed.

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

Member Spotlight – Judith Rainforth



Judith Rainforth grew up in Nebraska as a hard-working farm girl who continues to visit family and friends there because love of God, family and friends are her priority. She has always loved education and traveling. Judith was active in Friendship Force for several years in Nebraska before moving

to Arizona. She has been to all the continents, all 50 states, all of Canada and is working on all of Europe. Her plan to celebrate her 80th birthday in May is a Road Scholar trip to Japan during the Cherry Festival followed by spending the summer in Nebraska and Colorado. Enjoyment will be hiking, biking and horseback riding, which are ongoing favorite sports. A loving small poodle, Tink, will be company on the trip. Judith has three sons, six grandchildren and is now awaiting a second great grandchild.

A professional career includes three Master's degrees plus a Doctorate. Service involved Hospital Administration, Hospice Chaplaincy, Spiritual Direction and Ordained Ministry in the ELCA church, having been ordained in 2003. A ministry of presence has been a favorite calling in life and continues to be such as Judith enjoys retirement. Two areas of interest are the study and teaching about Native American culture and labyrinths. Judith explores both as she travels far and wide.

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

On Tuesday, October 21st your Board of Directors met for a planning and strategy meeting. During this meeting a nominating committee was appointed. All members are invited to self-nominate for the following elected positions. Contact one of the nominating committee members if you are interested. The key roles are listed below. The full

list is in the Bylaws. If you do not have a copy, ask any current board member for the information.

President – preside at all meetings, serve as liaison with FFI, serve as official spokesperson, sign or countersign withdrawal of funds of club.

Vice President – serve as chairperson of the Membership Committee, fill in for President when needed.

Secretary – Record minutes of meetings, handle correspondence of the club, issue official notices.

Treasurer – collect money due the club, deposit club funds, keep the books of the accounts, arrange for payment of accounts owed by the club

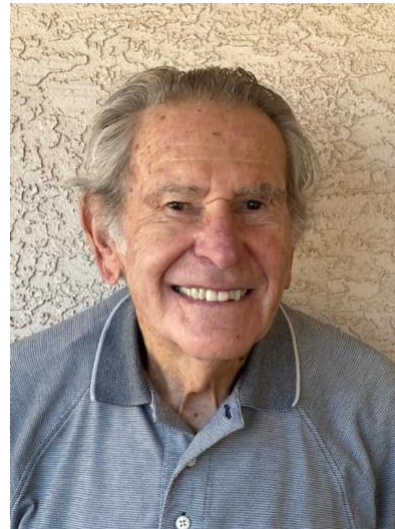
If you are interested in becoming involved with the club through a standing committee, please also contact one of the nominating committee members.

Membership – recruiting and orientation of new members

Communication – publicity, newsletter, website, speaker's bureau

Activities – programs, fund-raising

Member Spotlight – William (Bill) Kram



One day 30 years ago, I read a newspaper article that a local group in New Hampshire was offering a trip to New Zealand at an incredibly low cost. That was my introduction to Friendship Force. Since then I have been an active member and

sometime traveler.

I am a retired electrical engineer from General Electric that moved me to Syracuse, NY, Oklahoma City, OK and Dover, NH. I live now in Sun City West (SCW) with my dear partner Diane Shapiro where I spend most free time in the SCW Woodshop making sawdust. I have been a past president of this chapter and am now maintaining the web site.

Our Journey to Northern Colorado – June 2025

With thanks and credit to Russ Karow, of FF of Oregon Mid-Willamette Valley

A June 23-29 journey to Northern Colorado was organized by Chris Kastella with the Central Arizona Club and LaDonna Palm of Northern Colorado. Eleven ambassadors participated, six from AZ, two from OR, two from elsewhere in CO, and one from FL. Day one was the welcome dinner in the community center of a local retirement community. Day two began with a pontoon boat ride on Horsetooth Reservoir, the water source for Fort Collins located to the west of the city. The boat was usually used as a party boat, but with our FFI group was a bit more subdued. The boat driver could sing, play the guitar, steer with one foot and knew a very limited amount about local lore but the ride, while a bit chilly (low 60s with a breeze) was enjoyable. Lunch included outside seating at a local tavern. The afternoon highlight was a tour of New Belgium brewery – a local legend that was on the vanguard of the craft brewing industry. Our guide gave an enlightening tour highlighting the founding of the company and current status. Sustainability was part of the founding of the company and continues today. Beer samples were available to all – some likely to not be ongoing favorites. That evening, some went to a local group concert and “art in the garden” show at a local nursery.

Day three (Wednesday) was a free day with hosts. Activities included hiking, shopping, tours of nearby towns. Temperatures were in the upper 70s to mid-80s.

Day four began with a tour of Art Castings of CO. which was amazing.



One of our guides (there were two tour groups) had worked for the company for 26 years and had encyclopedic knowledge of the company. They produce the Heisman trophies, 10 & 20 year employee award statues for Pixar, and were refurbishing “Fearless Girl” – the bronze statue that at one time had faced off with the Wall Street bull in New York. We had lunch at and toured Benson Sculpture Garden in Loveland CO in the afternoon. Loveland has held an annual juried large sculpture show for several decades. The Arts Foundation that manages this show also purchases pieces from each show to place in the garden. At present there are



178 sculptures in the Garden which is FULL. Adjacent park areas are becoming sculpture homes. Small group dinners were held the evening of day four.

Day five featured host and ambassador tours of Rocky Mountain National Park and the town of Estes Park CO that serves as the entrance to the park when approaching from the east. Rains had been plentiful in May and early June so the Park was unusually green and colorful with full arrays of wild flowers.

You can drive through the Park going from ~5000 feet at Fort Collins, to ~7500 in Estes Park, to over 12,000 feet at one of the visitor centers just off the road. Deer, elk and other wildlife were observable. The 80-90 F temperatures in the Fort Collins were not noticeable at the higher elevations.

Chris K, Nancy M and LaDonna P of Colorado hiking Rock Mtn Natl Park

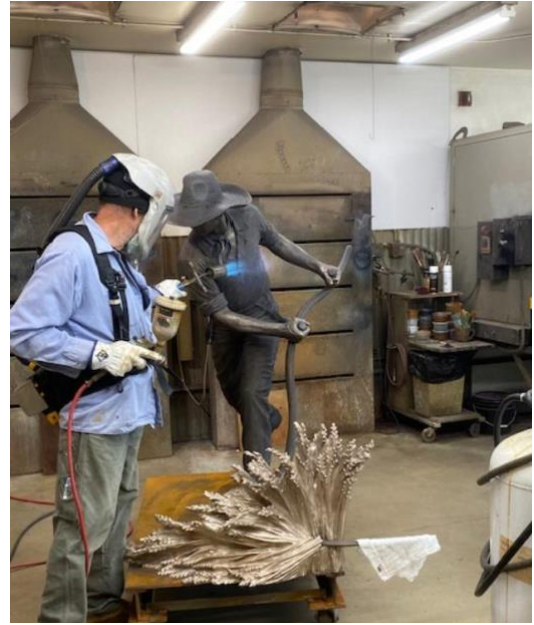


Day six was the Greeley Stampede Rodeo. We were treated to a back chutes tour prior to the rodeo, an assortment of rodeo foods (BBQ, catfish, buckets of cookies, an assortment of drinks), and all the components of a traditional rodeo – bareback, bull riding, children riding sheep, skilled horse riding. Temperatures were just shy of 100. We were fortunate to have seats with shade. Given the beating that some of the riders seemed to be taking in riding the bare back horses and bulls, none of the ambassadors expressed interest in trading places. A farewell pizza dinner was held that evening at the home of Ken and Paulette Weaver in Greeley. All participants noted that our ambassador and host sets were well matched and that everyone had an enjoyable time. Lots of new knowledge and new friends. The goals of FFI.

Greeley Stampede Opening Ceremony



Cleaning the Bronze at the Foundry



"The Wishbone" at Loveland, CO Sculpture Garden

