



friendship force

GREATER MILWAUKEE

a world of friends is a world of peace

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2026

www.friendshipforcemilwaukee.org

president's message

Wow, a new year is here, and 2026 looks like it will be another exciting one.

There are two outbound journeys, to Setouchi Hiroshima, Japan and Flathead Valley, Montana, and two inbound journeys, from Tallahassee, Florida and Toulouse, France. I encourage you to consider taking an active part in either traveling on an outbound journey or helping with an inbound journey. You may be able to do both.



Dave Loosen

In addition, the Activities Committee has a year filled with fascinating local places to see and learn about. If you enjoy good company and food, check out the Let's Eat Out opportunities. How about reading a good

book as part of the book club? There are also the Fifth at Fives where you get to socialize with fellow members while having some good food. Of course, there are also the three big events that you won't want to miss: the Spring Fling, the picnic, and the annual meeting.

I want to conclude this month's President's Message with sincere thanks to our board, and special thanks to our outgoing board members, Carrie Landers, secretary, and Dorothy Krupa, treasurer. I feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with these exceptional individuals.

I look forward to seeing you at future club activities.



REACH ALL THESE GOALS IN ONE DAY

IT ALL HAPPENS FEB. 4, STARTING WITH MIDDLE EASTERN LUNCH

- Improve your mind by trying new things.
- Commit to your personal development by continuing to learn.
- Connect with your friends by doing something new together.

On Feb. 4, you can hit all of these goals in one day. At 11:30 a.m., we will tour the Jerusalem Grocery and Deli at 17065 W. Capitol Dr. Suite 2, Brookfield. The store/deli has many authentic Middle Eastern and Mediterranean groceries.

Following the tour, our group will enjoy home-made food from the Middle East and Mediterranean regions for lunch. Gayle will pre-order all the food so that the restaurant has it all prepared for our visit. You will pay individually for your meal on the day of the event.

At 1:30 p.m., our FFGM group will venture five minutes west to the Sharon Lynne Wilson Center for the Arts, 3270

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at a glance

1/5 Fifth @ 5 host needed. Contact Barbara Geck to volunteer.

1/8 LEO 12:30 p.m. Su Plus 2 Fusion Cuisine, 7335 W. Greenfield Ave., West Allis. R.S.V.P. to Ann Line.

1/14: 11:30 a.m. lunch Mexiboricua Restaurant, 8015 N. 76th St., Milwaukee followed by tour of Milwaukee Pretzel Co. (\$13), 8050 N. Granville Rd..

1/21 Book Club. 1:30 p.m. via Zoom. *River Sing Me Home* (Barbados) by Eleanor Shearer.

2/2 FFGM Board meeting. 6:30 p.m. via Zoom.

2/4 Noon lunch at Jerusalem Grill, 17065 W. Capitol Dr, Ste. 2, Brookfield followed by 2 p.m. performance of "Hollywood Revisited" at Sharon Lynne Wilson Center, 3270 Mitchell Park Dr., Brookfield, \$22. R.S.V.P. to Gayle Best by **Jan. 3**.

2/8: 2-4 p.m. Fifth @ 5 (on the 8th). Home of Linda Epperson, W175 N8106 Robin Ct., Menomonee Falls. R.S.V.P. to Linda.

2/16 LEO 12:30 at KPOT Korean BBQ & Hot Pot, 2635 N. Mayfair Rd., Wauwatosa. R.S.V.P. to Ann Line.

2026 Journeys

April 1-7 - Setouchi Hiroshima, Japan, Outbound.

August 9-15 - Tallahassee, FL, Inbound

September TBD - Flathead Valley, Montana, Outbound

Late September/early October TBD - Toulouse, France, Inbound

FIFTH @ 5: 2026 hosts needed

Is 2026 the year you host a Fifth @ 5 gathering? There will be plenty of opportunities, starting with January. Let Barbara Geck know if you're able to help fill in the club's 2026 schedule. Especially during winter and fall months, you can move the date to a weekend and change the time to earlier in the day.

Linda Epperson, W175 N8106 Robin Ct., Menomonee Falls, will host the February gathering 2-4 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 8. To R.S.V.P., email or call Linda.

JAN. 21: book club

Start the 2026 New Year off by resolving to read more! The FFGM Book Club can help with that resolution. We meet at 1:30 p.m. on the second Wednesday of odd-numbered months, usually via Zoom.

Books — fiction or non-fiction — need to be set in another country or deal with a different culture or ethnicity. We are always looking for new people to join us. Come even if you haven't finished the book, but it would be nice if you had!

The following books are the winners of the book club voting for 2026. They are not listed in order of when they will be read. The order and facilitators will be determined at the January meeting.

- *River Sing Me Home* (Barbados) by Eleanor Shearer
- *Homegoing* (Ghana) by Yaa Gyasi
- *Mountains Beyond Mountains* (Haiti) by Tracy Kidder
- *The Glass Palace* (Burma) by Amitav Ghosh
- *Girl at War* (Croatia) by Sara Novic
- *Mona's Eyes* (France) by Thomas Schlessler.



At the Book Club in November, author Yance Marti talked about his book, *Wicked Milwaukee*.

The first book in 2026 will be *River Sings Me Home* (Barbados) by Eleanor Shearer. Ann Line is the facilitator.

Please note: The first meeting will take place on the third Wednesday of the month instead of the normal second Wednesday so as not to conflict with another FFGM activity on Jan. 14. The new date is Wednesday, Jan. 21 at 1:30 p.m. on Zoom.



JAN. 14: a taste of Gemütlichkeit — a pretzel tour

Take a live production tour of the Milwaukee Pretzel Company, 8050 N. Granville Woods Rd., Milwaukee, at 1 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 14.

We will take a guided walking tour of its bakery and warehouse to learn every twist and turn of authentic Bavarian soft pretzels. We'll see the pretzel process up close — from how pretzel dough is made and rolled into twists — and learn about the history of Milwaukee Pretzel Company. The best part ... we will get to enjoy a freshly baked 5-ounce pretzel.

The tour will cost \$13 and lasts 30-45 minutes with time available for questions, photos and, of course,

some shopping. More information on clothing requirements and parking will be emailed to those who are attending.

All tour guests receive 30% off all day of pretzel and merchandise purchases and a coupon for a 20% discount on future orders.

Before the tour, we will meet for lunch at 11:30 a.m. at Mexiboricua Restaurant, 8015 N. 76th St. (It is in the same building as the AS Petro Mart.) Mexiboricua Restaurant is a family-owned gem in Milwaukee, offering a unique fusion of Mexican and Puerto Rican cuisine.

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Mitchell Park Dr., Brookfield, for a dazzling musical revue, "Hollywood Revisited." From 2 to 4 p.m., the revue features classical numbers that bring vintage Tinseltown glamour to life.

Performers will be wearing authentic costumes worn by Ginger Rogers, Julie Andrews, and Judy Garland.

R.S.V.P. to Gayle Best by **Jan. 3**. When R.S.V.P.ing, please indicate your meal choice by viewing the Jerusalem Deli menu at jerusalembrookfieldgrocery.com.

Please note that only 20 tickets for "Hollywood Revisited" have been blocked off for Friendship Force, so R.S.V.P. to get a seat at the Sharon Lynne Wilson Center for the Arts. The cost of this performance originally was \$30, but there is group rate of \$27. However, FFGM is reducing the cost of the ticket by \$5. So your final cost is \$22. You will be invoiced this amount by our new treasurer, Tony Igl.

NEXT ON OUR PLATE

from thai/mexican fusion to korean

Join your FFGM friends as we continue to explore local dining establishments, especially the hidden gems, for our Let's Eat Out gatherings. We have been doing this for a whole year now. Normally, we meet at 12:30 p.m. for lunch, and the day of the week will vary.

We will start 2026 with these venues:

- **Thursday, Jan. 8**, Su Plus 2, 7335 W. Greenfield Ave., West Allis. This is a restaurant specializing in fusion cuisine, specifically Thai and Mexican. Its menu is varied and includes crepes, omelettes, burritos, and paninis, as well as salads, sandwiches, and pasta.
- **Monday, Feb. 16**, KPOT Korean BBQ & Hot Pot, 2635 N. Mayfair Rd., Wauwatosa. Let's try something a bit different! This new restaurant is all-you-can-eat Korean BBQ or Hot Pot. You choose your protein and vegetables and cook them on a tabletop grill. The lunch price is \$20.99 and includes dessert.

LEOs are great activities for newer FFGM members, as well as long-time members. R.S.V.P. to Ann Line.



TASTES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Diners in December enjoyed lunch at Gus's Deli in West Allis, with an international menu from burritos to gyros. In November, LEO took members to Indian Garden in Wauwatosa.



GOOD TIMES TRULY ROLLED

Seven members of FFGM, along with a couple from Spokane, WA, and two women from Colorado, saw the best of the Baton Rouge, LA, area in November. Besides getting to know wonderful home hosts and dinner hosts better, the group had a chance to hold a baby alligator during a swamp tour, spent a Saturday morning dancing to a live Zydeco band, learned about the lives of enslaved laborers on a sugar plantation, and toured the state capitol building — the tallest capitol building in the country — and the beautiful old capitol. Through these and many other experiences, the group was constantly learning about Louisiana culture and history, including during an extension to New Orleans.



civil war museum



About a dozen FFGM members toured the Kenosha Civil War Museum, ate at the Kenosha Tap House, and rode a streetcar along the Lake Michigan shoreline in November.



international institute and kinship cafe

FFGM members toured the International Institute of Wisconsin on Oct. 28 and learned about the important work it does with refugee resettlement, job training and international leadership. The group also enjoyed lunch at the Kinship Cafe, a workforce development project.



HAVE YOU TAKEN THE SURVEY?

Thanks to everyone who has filled out a survey prepared by our club's vice president, Stephanie Freier. The survey is an effort to learn more about your interests, preferences and ideas, in hopes of making our group more engaging to all of us.

If you haven't yet filled it out, you can find the survey at:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfikjn0fIVdRq2OGO8kTkTnDQSyVYo8mnOfQZCr60nwQLgdZw/viewform?>



PERUVIAN ADVENTURE

Four members of FFGM joined the Northern Illinois FF in October for a journey to Tarapoto and Lima, Peru, with most going on to Cusco and Machu Picchu — a reminder that there are many potential adventures available with Friendship Force outside our own club.



5TH @ 5 GATHERING

Several FFGM members chat at the November gathering at the home of Glenn and Doris Mertens in Stone Bank.

membership

WANT TO JOIN US?

NEW MEMBERS:

Tony Igl

Susan Klopatek

We welcome new members! A membership form for FFGM is available at http://www.friendshipforcemilwaukee.org/uploads/1/7/2/9/17291124/ffgm_membership_application_2025.pdf.

'BIGGEST FF CLUB IN THE WORLD'

LOOSEN: ACTIVE MEMBERS KEEP US HEALTHY

Dave Loosen, President, welcomed attendees and called the meeting to order at 1:35 pm. Sunday, Dec. 14, at New Berlin Hills Golf Course. Of all of the world's Friendship Force clubs, he noted, the Greater Milwaukee chapter has the most members — 122.

Treasurer's Report—Dorothy Krupa said that FFGM's Total General and Restricted Cash balance is \$32,733.48, which includes \$6,875.61 in General Checking, \$20,575.40 in the General Restricted Account (Wellington Mutual Fund), and \$5,282.47 in Restricted Checking. Dorothy described the financial condition of the club as excellent and noted that the large amount of money available in the General Restricted Account enabled FFGM to subsidize FFI membership dues, which were increased from \$30 to \$100 for 2026. Because of our club's liquidity, the Board voted in October to help members pay these dues for at least 2026 and 2027. Dorothy said she believed FFI had to raise its dues in order to remain sustainable. A motion was made and seconded to accept the financial report, and members voted to approve it.

Community Outreach—Dave Kalan briefly described FFGM's volunteer involvement with three organizations:

- NourishMKE is Milwaukee's largest network of community food centers and over the past year has served over 59,000 people. Valerie MacMillan, director, explained that NourishMKE has four sites in Milwaukee. Several FFGM members are regular volunteers at the Mitchell Street site and have been responsible for many donations from FFGM members. Chad Walter, the manager of the Mitchell Street site, said more volunteers are always welcome.
- Street Life provides basic needs, such as food, clothing, sleeping bags and tents, to homeless people. FFGM volunteers regularly make peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for Street Life.
- The International Institute of Wisconsin is an organization with which Dave has been involved for years. He and Rick Piraino have hosted dinners in their homes for International Fellows who come to Milwaukee through the Institute for 4 to 6 weeks to work with nonprofits. Bob and Jan Blazich hosted a

Fellow for a month in their home.

- Dave recognized the FFGM members who volunteer for these organizations.

Membership—Dorothy Kelley reported that FFGM is the largest Friendship Force club in the world, with a current membership of 122. She attributes our growth to members spreading the word about the value of the club and to our strong Activity Committee. FFGM hopes to have an on-line application in the near future.

Activity Committee—Chairs Ann Line and Gayle Best

Ann recognized the members of the committee and gave a brief recap of the monthly activities for 2025. The FFGM Book Club meets monthly via Zoom, in member's homes or in other venues. In April the club read its 50th book. Ann also reviewed the restaurants visited by participants in Let's Eat Out (LEO), which started in 2025.

Gayle presented upcoming activities for January and February. The LEO on Jan. 8 will be at Su Plus 2 Fusion Cuisine in West Allis. On Jan. 14 a group will visit the Mexican/Puerto Rican restaurant Mexiboricua and tour the Milwaukee Pretzel Company. The Jan. 21 book club will discuss *River Sing Me Home* via Zoom. The Activity Committee has reserved 20 tickets for the February 4 performance of the play *Hollywood Revisited* at the Sheryl Lynne Wilson Center for the Arts, Brookfield, after a tour of and lunch at Jerusalem Grocery and Deli.

Gayle thanked FFGM members for donating silent auction baskets for sale at today's meeting, and she was very pleased that 45 can openers were contributed to give to food pantry clients. Recently a client of the pantry ex-



Doris Mertens



Tony Igl

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plained that she did not take any canned food because she did not have a can opener.

Fifth at Five—Barbara Geck explained that in the winter, Fifth at Fives are held from 2-4 p.m. so people don't have to drive home in the dark, and they are usually held in the afternoon on the Sunday closest to the 5th.

Journey highlights for 2025

- Chris Vogel said that in July the club hosted a mini-inbound from Cedar Rapids/Iowa City.
- Kathy Buenning reported that the August inbound journey from Adelaide, Australia involved 9 ambassadors and 9 hosts, 6 dinner hosts and 10 day hosts. As the host coordinator, Kathy was grateful for all the assistance she received.
- Cindy Hum was the ambassador coordinator for the November outbound journey to Baton Rouge and New Orleans. Ambassadors included seven FFGM members as well as 4 FF members from Spokane, Washington, and Colorado.

Journey previews for 2026

- Joe Geck and Robert Patzwald are ambassador coordinators for the outbound journey to Hiroshima, Japan, in April. They believe the trip, which is limited to 10 people, is full, and several people are on the waiting list.
- In August an outbound journey to Flathead Valley, Montana, has openings for only 4-6 people in addition to coordinators Mary Wacker and Sharron Ronco.
- From August 9-16 our club is hosting up to 15 ambassadors from Tallahassee, Florida. Laura Lessila is the host coordinator. Hosts, dinner hosts and day hosts are needed for this journey.

- Ann Line is the coordinator for the inbound journey from Toulouse, France, this fall, probably at the end of September or early October. This trip was originally planned for the fall of 2023 but had to be rescheduled. Ann has told Toulouse our club can host 10 people.

Several members of FFGM went along on journeys sponsored by other clubs. Ann Line and Clarine Furey each went on 6 such journeys in 2025. Chris discussed a trip she and 3 other FFGM members took to Peru with the Northern Illinois club in October. Stephanie Freier recently returned from an amazing 10 days in Sri Lanka, a trip she found on the FFI website. She noted that any Friendship Force member from around the world can check the website and sign up for trips that have openings. She and others at the meeting strongly encouraged FFGM members to take the opportunities available for travel and making friends all over the world.

Election of Officers

Bob Mitchell proposed the nomination of Doris Mertens for Secretary and Tony Igl for Treasurer and presented brief background information about each. A nomination was made and seconded. Attendees of the Annual Meeting elected Doris Mertens as Secretary and Tony Igl as Treasurer.

Dave Loosen thanked outgoing Treasurer Dorothy Krupa and outgoing Secretary Carrie Landers for their service. He also thanked former President Chris Vogel for her mentorship since he took over this position in 2025.

Dave Loosen closed the meeting at 3:07 p.m. with several inspirational quotes.

The Board will vote in February on approving these minutes.

YOU MADE A DIFFERENCE!

On behalf of Nourish MKE, thank you so much for your outpouring of support at the annual Christmas meeting.

With the silent auction and the greeting card sales, we raised **\$1,025** for the Mitchell Street Food Center. Also our generous Friendship Force members quickly responded to the request to bring in can openers; **45** can openers will be given to individuals/families that were unable to take

canned goods because they lacked an opener. Also toiletries kits were brought in by a Friendship Force member, and **130** Sendik bags valued at \$22.10 (\$.17 per bag) were donated to the food pantry to carry the canned goods. Other plastic bags were given to help clients carry their food.

Our Friendship Force of Greater Milwaukee has truly shown our local Milwaukee community the true definition of the Christmas spirit.



ROBERT PATZWALD



As a young adventurer I would daydream about taking trips, journeys that were accomplished via books and paper maps. One trip I remember planning was to Pierre, SD — only because I had recently met some extended relatives and wanted to drive my dream car there. Of course, it was a 1964 Corvette Stingray. Interstate highways were still in the development stage so the main highway I would travel was US Highway 18! I also planned a trip on an 8- to 10-foot hydroplane I was itching to purchase to cross the narrow stretch of water connecting the Black Sea and the Sea of Marmara. But let's extend this trip and travel farther towards the Aegean Sea! Then I started to think about logistics, like gas purchases, food and overnight stays.

This early life activity did foster skill development of planning and executing future trips. During my college days, I had a contract job driving executive cars one way from Milwaukee to exotic destinations such as Kansas City, KS; Florence and Myrtle Beach, SC; San Antonio, TX; New Orleans and Thibodaux, LA; and Raleigh, NC. I earned a nickel a mile and all expenses were covered except food. All these trips were planned with paper maps and the paper edition of the North American Airline Guide of Flight Schedules.

These hard-earned skills also came into use recently when I drove to New Orleans and Baton Rouge on the outbound trip with FFGM. I'm hoping to go to Montana with FFGM in September, then drive on to Washington and Oregon to places I've dreamed of visiting. My only international travel so far has been to Canada. I have flown to Toronto and Calgary, Alberta and rode via car to Toronto and Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario several times. I am hoping to travel by plane (or maybe a cruise ship?) for the outbound trip to Japan in April, as my trip of a lifetime. I look forward to riding the Bullet Train, and yes, I have already looked up the train schedule for it.

So, how did you all get into traveling when you were impressionable children? Enjoy your day!