



Friendship Force
INTERNATIONAL

friendship force

CENTRAL IOWA

May/June 2026

FFCI Officers

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Open

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Newsletter

Open

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Dennis Dake

Park Woodle

Activity Committee

Charene Starcevic

Marcia Thompson

Dot Dake

Name Badges

Kueier Chung

Carole Magilton

Friendship Committee

Susan Woodle

Dear FFCI Members,

Spring is finally here to stay, anyway I hope there will be no more opportunitys for snow.

2027 is Friendship Force International’s 50th Anniversary and plans for the celebration were in the the works to travel to Strasberg, France in the spring. Due to the conflict in the Middle East, the FFI staff decided that the most responsible course of action was to pause the final decision and allow some time to see how the global situation develops. The FFI team have decided to postpone the 50th Anniversary celebration until late 2027, most likely September or October. **The 50th Anniversary is a once-in-a-generation celebration of the friendships we have built together over five decades. We want to ensure that when we do gather, it is in a setting and at a moment when our members can travel comfortably and fully enjoy the experience. Watch for future updates.**

Our club has been adding events to our schedule. We hope you can join the group to one or more of our events. This opens opportunities for us to invite friends and family to join us. Check out FFCI Calendar of Events, and ask someone to take part in an event with you. We can always add additional events. If you have an idea which you think would be a good event, contact one of members of the Activity Committee to spin your idea.

It is almost time for the Friendship Force “All Iowa Picnic.” The picnic is being hosted by the Quad Cities Friendship Force on **July 11th**. The Activity Committee is planning to carpool to the picnic. Watch for emails, to sign up to attend the picnic and to travel to the Quad Cities for the All-Iowa Picnic. Do not forget to save this date on your busy calendar.

What is Friendship Force? Founded in 1977 by visionary Wayne Smith and supported by the late President Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter, Friendship Force International is a non-profit cultural organization focused on promoting understanding, cultural education, and citizen diplomacy through homestay journeys and personal friendships. Through these exciting, personal encounters, strangers become friends – and we know that by experiencing different views, you can discover common ground. **Check out the new look for the Friendship Force website <https://friendshipforce.org/> The website is now viewable on your phone. Take a look!**

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FFCI Calendar of Events

April 30 - Pella Tulip Festival-day trip - Diane Oppendal and Park Woodle, are hosting a day trip to Pella, Iowa, for pre-Tulip Time viewing. More about our day trip in the next newsletter.

May 8 - Senior Expo— 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. [Register at this link:](#) **BY MAY 6TH** to be entered into a drawing! Gateway Hotel & Conference Center. FFCI will not have a table at this event.

May 15 - Cinco de Mayo/International Lunch - Host: **Marybeth Buchele & Dot Dake** –

RSVP by signing up at the following link: [Cinco de Mayo Sign up](#) Check out page 3 for more info.

May 20 – Coffee & Chat - Wednesday at 60 Forward – Join FFCI to catch up on what is happening.

RSVP to Alta at altajerbyg@gmail.com

June 11 - Actors (Footloose) – Ames Community Theater 7 p.m. Tickets have been purchased, contact Alta at altajerbyg@gmail.com if you have any questions.

June 16 - Board Meeting, 2127 Coneflower Ct., 4 to 6 p.m.

June 18 - Coffee & Chat - Thursday at 60 Forward – Join FFCI to catch up on what is happening. RSVP to

Alta at altajerbyg@gmail.com

July - Bandshell Concert & Potluck – Hosts: **Lynne VanValin & Karen Wilson (Date to be determined)**

July 11 - All Iowa FF in Quad Cities (possible overnight) – Hosts: **Alta Byg & Charene Starcevic**

July 15 – Coffee & Chat - Wednesday at 60 Forward – Join FFCI to catch up on what is happening.

August 14 & 15 - Senior Variety Show

August 18 - Board Meeting, 2127 Coneflower Ct., 4 to 6 p.m.

August 20 - Coffee & Chat - Thursday at 60 Forward – Join FFCI to catch up on what is happening.

RSVP to Alta at altajerbyg@gmail.com

August - LEO, Hosts: Cheryl Binzen & Marcia Thompson (Date to be determined)

September - Idea: Trivia Afternoon Hosts: Ginny & Stu Huntington & Marcia Thompson

October - Idea: Oktoberfest Hosts: Lynn Avant & Kitty Fisher (Date to be determined)

November 7 - Annual meeting at 10 a.m. in the Great Room in Northcrest

December 5 - Holiday Party – Hosts: **Charene S. Alta B., Dot D. & Judy M.**

Contact the committee: Charene Starcevic at larcha1623@gmail.com, Marcia Thompson at Marciat_ames@yahoo.com, Dot Dake at dotdake42@gmail.com to sign up for a month. Idea listed are only an idea, you can use that idea or come up with your own.

It is easier to invite people to join our group if we have events and have them visit.

Welcome New Member:

Join me in welcoming our new member, **Kathy Birdsall**. She will be joining us on the journey to Greater Hamilton & Burlington in September. She should be home for her birthday which is September 19th. Her contact information is: 843 W 190th St., Unit 69, Ames IA 50010, email: brldly61@gmail.com, cell: 515-460-6412.



The FFCI singers will be performing at the Senior Variety Show.

Great news! Eleven FFCI members auditioned on April 11 at Northminster Presbyterian Church in Ames. In attendance were: Kitty Fisher, (our awesome director) Marybeth Buchele, Alta & Jerry Byg, Sedahlia Crase, Dot & Dennis Dake, Peggy Faden, Stu Huntington, Carole Magilton, Diane Oppedal, and Lynne Van Valin. The finale was a bit more dramatic than planned. As the group tossed their globe beach balls to the crowd, two of our members took a tumble. Other than the unfortunate accident, our audition was a great success. A big Thank You to Sedahlia for going with Lynne to the emergency room to make sure there was no serious injury.

I hope you will join us for one of the performances at Ames City Auditorium which will be **August 14 and 15th. Save the date!**



L to R: Kitty Fisher (director), Peggy Faden, Carole Magilton, Alta Byg, Dennis Dake, Row 2: Jerry Byg, Diane Oppedal, Dot Dake, & Stu Huntington



Stu Huntington supervises Dennis Dake in the inflating of the "World" Beach Balls



Check out these confident singers. Audition Day: L to R: Peggy Fagen, Diane Oppedal, Lynne Van Valin, Marybeth Buchele, Dot Dake, Alta Byg, Jerry Byg, Dennis Dake, Stu Huntington.

Celebrations!

May & June Birthdays

Margaret Epplin – June 10

Jerry Fuller – June 24

Anniversary's

If you had a birthday or an anniversary and we did not know, please send it to Susan Woodle woodle.sue@gmail.com, so we can add them to our records.



Celebrate Cinco de Mayo

On **Friday, May 15 at noon** will celebrate Cinco de Mayo, a few days late.

Please RSVP by listing the food you plan to bring on the following document: [Cinco de Mayo Sign up](#)

Plan on gathering at Marybeth Buchele's for a potluck lunch. There's ample parking at 4122 Cochrane Parkway or carpool with another FFCI member.

Think bold flavors like guacamole or salsa with corn chips, tamale pie or quiche with green chilies and cheese.

Try classic desserts like store-bought churros or home-made flan or Tres leches. Mexican desserts are often fruits or fruit salads. If you are not into Mexican cooking, bring fruit or your favorite dish.

Questions contact: Marybeth (515-231-9113 C) (515-233-6068 H) or Dot Dake (515-292-1145 H) (515-291-9145 C) for questions or recipes.

Coffee and Chat

FFCI members gathered to have coffee on the third Wednesday or Thursday at 60 Forward at 10 a.m. We on meeting each month so if you cannot join us this month, we hope you can make it the next. Check the calendar of events for dates. We will be alternating on Wednesday & Thursdays.

Invite your friends to join us! Check out the Calendar of Events for our next dates. Watch emails for reminders or any changes.



SENIOR EXPO
PRESENTED BY *Seniors in Story*
FRIDAY, MAY 8TH, 2026
9:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M.
GATEWAY HOTEL & CONFERENCE CENTER
2100 GREEN HILLS DR, AMES
SENIORSINSTORY.ORG

Senior Expo

FFCI will not have a table at this year's Senior Expo. If you are planning on attending, do not forget to sign up. It is free to attend, but they would like you to register. [Register at this link:](#)

Gardens Galore

A Free walking garden tour with
live music at
Northcrest Community
Ames, Iowa

May 30, 2026 10 a.m. to noon
Rain date June 6



FREE parking and shuttle bus at Ames
High School 1810 Ridgewood
Park in lots closest to 20th Street



FFI Workshops for May & June

To check out the workshops, log
into: [Link to register](#)

May

How to be a good ambassador
– May 5, 12:30

Travel Insurance Q & A – May 7,
7:00 PM

Using AI in Your Favour Within
FFI's Context – May 13, 11 AM

New Member Orientation –
May 20, 7:00 PM

June

General Club & Journey Q&A –
June 11, 6:00 PM

Let's Eat Out for

St. Patrick's Day at Dublin Bay

Twelve members of FFCI met for lunch at Dublin Bay to celebrate St Patrick's Day a little early. Stu Huntington, Marybeth Buchele, Dot Dake, Dennis Dake, Alta Byg, Jerry Byg, Charene Starcevic, Lynn Avant, Judy Mongin, Lynne Van Valin, Peggy Faden & Ginny Huntington.



INTERNATIONAL FRIENDSHIP FAIR AND FFCI INTERNATIONAL FRIENDSHIP FORCE DAY



On March 7th, Friendship Force Central Iowa joined with the ISU-YWCA and International Friendship Fair (IFF) for a day of sharing of cultures. The YWCA & IFF hold these

Friendship Fairs a couple times a year. Thi Minh Sang Nguyen with IFF organized the event and with the help of FFCI was able to have someone at each table. A record number of visitors

attended the event, with 77 guests.



Diane Oppedal wrote the following about the event:

I was pleased

with the Saturday PM attendance at the Ames Public Library. Although the auditorium was not packed, there were enough visitors for a steady flow of people; people willing to stop at my Thailand/Ghana table, where I shared photos and stories from my trips to those countries. I particularly



enjoyed visiting with the children who came by and conversing with a December ISU postgraduate from Egypt, who had her 4-month-old son with her! She said once she returns home, she will have family help with her son.

The ISU grad and undergrad presenters wore costumes, brought their families and special elaborate clothing. Their families included a couple of adorable infants and some very cute active preschoolers. I had time to visit with the presenters from Sir Lanka, Vietnam, and Oman; three countries I have never visited.

Many thanks to Sang of the YWCA for sponsoring the event and to our own Alta Byg for Co-sponsoring FFCI. Sang brought display posters for every table.



Alta was there for the Brazil table, Jerry was at the Canada table, and Alta made and brought 2 kinds of international baked treats to share with all. (I also sampled a light Cardamon coffee at the Oman table.) Other FFCI members helping at the event were Lynne Van Valen, at the Mexico table, Charene Starcevic, Dennis and Dot Dake. Click on the following link for the [Vancouver Island Cookie](#) recipe.



Save the Date!!

Saturday, July 11, 2026,
for the **All-Iowa Gathering** hosted by
FF Quad Cities!!

It will be a Trifecta!!!

FFQC is ready to celebrate and entertain!

1. All Iowa Gathering on July 11th from 11:30-1:30pm. We will have some social time, lunch, and a short program. We will meet at the Bettendorf Presbyterian Church, at 1200 Middle Road, Bettendorf, Iowa (just off I74). Cost will be \$20/person.
2. The Friendship Force QC club is celebrating its 45th Anniversary and we are looking forward to including you in our celebration at the All Iowa Gathering! We will recognize long term members, display some travel memorabilia, and enjoy cake and Whitey's ice cream for dessert at the Gathering.
3. Stay for a mini-journey and make it a full weekend! After the official All Iowa Gathering, FFQC will host and entertain you the rest of Saturday and on Sunday. You can head back home Monday morning after breakfast. \$110/person

Please click the link below and fill out the form to indicate your potential interest by May 1, 2026. Final information and request for money, will be sent out at a later date. Link: <https://forms.gle/462oHV4Pk4HtDLRg8> OR Contact Deb Steele at 563-468-1849 or deb.steele6@gmail.com with your potential interest or questions.



Quad Cities

Tentatively what would be in the Journey portion:

Friendship Force Journey Agenda:
INTERNATIONAL

Saturday: Buffalo Bill Museum, Celebration Belle Dinner Cruise

Sunday: QC Botanical Center, Hauberg Museum, Small Group Dinner, Backwater Gambler show

Monday: Group Breakfast

**We currently are gathering interest in this weekend Journey by May 1st.
A formal All Iowa Gathering Flyer will be coming soon!!**

Space available in journey to Cedar Rapids.

Want to travel, but do not want to fly.

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 in on this journey. Attached is some information about Cedar Rapids-Iowa City. If you are interested you can contact any of the following people:

Judy Cohen judycohen@xmission.com Ambassador Coordinator from Utah; Nancy

York stampingnancy@gmail.com Host Coordinator from Cedar Rapids;

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

Journey to Friendship Force Cedar Rapids-Iowa City

Enjoy the warm hospitality of eastern Iowa, located in the Midwest of the United States. Our club has members in Cedar Rapids (population 137,000 in 2020), Iowa City (population 75,000) as well as many smaller communities nearby. Our spring, summer and fall seasons are particularly enjoyable. Winter can bring snow and cold temperatures, though not every year.

Cedar Rapids is an economic hub with electronic manufacturing, healthcare services, food processing and regional distribution centers. Iowa City features the University of Iowa, which is home to the world-renowned Iowa Writers Workshop, the University of Iowa Stanley Museum and the University of Iowa Healthcare system featuring specialty clinics and a teaching hospital. The Interstate 380 corridor, which connects these two cities, is home to almost 500,000 people.

Arts and Culture:

- National Czech and Slovak Museum reflect early population of the area from Czechoslovakia and exhibits of current culture from the area
- Cedar Rapids Museum of Art, featuring regional artists including Grant Wood, noted for his painting, American Gothic.
- African American Museum, stories of past and present African American population in Iowa
- The University of Iowa Stanley Museum,
- The Paramount Theater, performances by Orchestra Iowa and traveling theater and music groups
- Hancher Auditorium, University of Iowa's premier performance venue
- Orchestra Iowa, features musicians from the corridor playing classical and pop music
- Theatre Cedar Rapids, outstanding amateur performers star in dramatic and musical shows

Nearby areas featured on day trips:

Amana Colonies, seven villages settled by Germans immigrants looking to escape religious persecution, reflects the history of communal living and farming and evolution to present day specialty and artisan shops.

Dubuque Mississippi River Museum, including view of the river and a lock and dam.

Field of Dreams, shows area where movie, Field of Dreams, was filmed and today offers baseball fields for casual play and by baseball teams.

Kalona, a community that shows Amish and Mennonite ways of living including farms, a bakery, woodworking shop and Amish grocery store.

Herbert Hoover Presidential Museum, West Branch

For more information go to: <http://www.friendshipforcecr-ic.org/about-us/>