



friendship force
WESTERN
NORTH CAROLINA

Mountain Friends

Volume 26, Issue 2 February/March 2026

Dick Weaver and Diane Jennette, editors

President's Message

Dear Members,

I hope this message finds you well! As we embark on another exciting year together, I want to take a moment to discuss an important aspect of our club—membership.

Our club thrives on the connections we build and the new ideas we welcome. To ensure that our membership process flows smoothly and effectively, all referrals for potential new members should be directed to our dedicated Membership Committee. This team, which includes Dick Weaver, Susan Gaston, Harriett Hilton, and Margie Weaver, plays a crucial role in welcoming newcomers and enriching our community.

Their wonderful hospitality and commitment to fostering a welcoming environment have significantly enhanced our club's knowledge and spirit. I encourage you to reach out to them with any referrals or suggestions for potential members. Together, we can continue to grow and strengthen our club. [Prospective New Member Form](#)

Thank you for your ongoing support and dedication. Let's make this year one of connection and growth!

Tessa Levizon

Look for Email Blasts for Upcoming Events

Kay Manley has volunteered to send periodic email blasts to members for events that will occur within the next week to ten days. Be sure to include her email address in your contact file so you can receive these important emails.

Calendar at a Glance

February

2/10 (Tue) - **Board Meeting** 10am – Jackson Park, 1000 Jackson Park Road, H'ville

2/13 (Fri) - **Pass the Spoon 11am** - hosted by Gerard Stamm at Moose Café, 570 Brevard Rd Asheville

March

3/1 (Sun) -- **World Friendship Day 3 - 5pm - [La Rumba Restaurant Latino](#)**. RSVP to Tessa by February 26

3/10 (Tue) - **Board Meeting** 10am – Jackson Park, Jackson Park Road, H'ville

3/15 (Sun) - **General Meeting** 3 - 5pm –Middleton Place Clubhouse, 2001 Middleton Pl, H'ville

3/18 (Wed) -**Happy Hour** 4:30 - 6pm - Look for email blast with details

April

4/14 (Tue) - **Board Meeting** 10am – Jackson Park, 1000 Jackson Park Road, H'ville

4/24 (Fri) - **Book Club** 1:30pm – **Miss Brenda and the Loveladies** by Brenda Spahn hosted by Larry Harvey

4/15 (Wed) -**Happy Hour 4:30 – 6pm** Look for email blast with details

TBD - **Pass the Spoon** hosted by February's winner! Look for email blast with details.

Pass the Spoon Lunch - Ellen Brazauskas

The February "Pass the Spoon" will be at The Moose Cafe, at 570 Brevard Rd Asheville. We will be meeting at **11 am on Friday, February 13 (This is a date change from the January newsletter)**. Yes, this is Friday the 13th but who is superstitious! If you are planning on having lunch with us, contact Gerard Stamm so he can contact the restaurant with an estimated head count.

Contact Information for Club Members Listed in this Newsletter

To protect privacy, contact information for club members is available on the member page of the FFWNC website www.ffwesternnc.org, in the 2025 Directory, and in the 2026 Directory (coming in March). Consult the directory for information about how to access the website or ask another member.

January Events Recap



The January **General Meeting** was held on January 18 with 20 club members and four guests in attendance. Three of the guests joined the club

that day! Susan Harvey and Ellen Brazauskas talked about the recent Western Michigan Journey and showed slides [Western Michigan Outbound Journey Link](#)

Upcoming Journeys – Susan Harvey

- Ottawa, Canada Outbound: June 7 – 14, 2026, Coordinators: Eleen Brazauskas, Nancy Wood
- Tarapoto, Peru Inbound: August 29 – September 4, 2026 (tentative), Coordinators: Karen Brown, Tessa Levizon
- **NEW!** Oregon (we can join the Raleigh FFI club) Outbound: September 9 -16, 2026 (tentative), Coordinator: Karen Brown
- Napa, Sonoma, CA Outbound: September 17 – 23, 2026 (tentative), Coordinator: Susan Harvey
- Greater Orlando, FL Inbound: Oct 6 – 12, 2026 (tentative), Coordinator: Harriet Hilton
- When Journey applicants exceed the number of spaces available, the process for selecting Ambassadors is described in FFWNC Policies and Procedures. [Ambassador Selection Procedures](#)

Newsletter Deadline

We have shifted to a bimonthly newsletter. If you have Club news for the **April/May newsletter**, please submit your information to Diane Jennette **no later than** March 15.

A New Beginning – Tessa Levizon and Dick Weaver

FFI and our club are in transition. We lost about one-third of our club members when FFI decided to increase the annual dues. Some were simply not active because of age or ill health. Others were looking for new opportunities elsewhere. **Life happens**. Our board of directors, the remaining members, and the three members who joined us in January are dedicated to bringing our club back to a time when we were recognized as the **club of the year**.

Membership Focus - Dick Weaver

The membership committee has been actively reviewing the **100 Recruitment Ideas** handout posted on the FFI website and learning what works at other clubs. Our plan is to develop a comprehensive approach to identify and recruit new members; however, a successful plan will involve the participation of all members in various capacities. Our focus will include **identifying** potential members, **sharing** our stories, **interacting** with club members at various events, and **mentoring** those who join through an onboarding program. We had over 100 members pre-Covid, including many from Asheville and other areas of Henderson and Buncombe counties. There is nothing stopping us from building our membership [Prospective New Member Form](#)

From The Archives



Friendship Force of Western North Carolina (FFWNC) was founded in 1979. Governor Jim Hunt was asked by President Jimmy and Rosalyn Carter to organize Friendship Force in North Carolina. Marie Colton, a state legislator from Asheville at the time, was our founding president. She passed away in 2018 at the age of 95. [Marie Colton Obituary](#)

Since our club's founding, more than 3,000 people in Western North Carolina have participated in journeys either as hosts for foreign guests or as citizen ambassadors overseas experiencing cultures and countries across Europe, Central Asia, Southeast Asia, Australia, and New Zealand, as well as Central and South America.

Quarterly Book Club - Harriet Hilton

Our book club meets quarterly in January, April, July, and October. On a rotating basis, a member picks a book for the meeting, leads the discussion, and sets the location for the event. Sometimes we meet in homes and sometimes at local coffee spots. Meetings are usually 1:30 to 3 pm. Selection of a book is normally based around travel, the global impact of peace and conflict management, or cultural issues. Our last book was **The Rose Code** by Kate Quinn, a heart-stopping World War II historical fiction novel of three female code breakers at Bletchley Park and the spy they must root out after the war is over.

The next meeting is April 24 at Larry Harvey 's house. We will read **Miss Brenda and the Loveladies** by Brenda Spahn, which is about previously incarcerated women and their journeys and struggles to succeed once released.

All FFWNC members are welcome to join this book club. If interested, contact Harriett Hilton.

Social Media – Sharing Our Story with the Community and the World

Marti Wilmering has volunteered to post club news on our Facebook page, which will be reopening soon. Look at what has been posted in the past, through the dedication of **Ron Partin**. It presents quite a story of our history. Thanks, Ron! [FFWNC Facebook Link](#)

Dick Weaver is the new administrator on our website, www.ffwesternnc.org, taking the reins from **Diane Tokarski** who managed it for many years. Thanks Diane! **Look for new postings beginning in March.**

Contact Marti or Dick if you want to help revitalize these social media platforms.

FFI Online Training for Leaders and Members

FFI offers training for new cub leader orientation, new member orientation, travel insurance Q&A, general club and journey Q&A. For more information, click [FFI Online Training](#) and select 2026 at bottom of the sheet.

FFI World Friendship Day – March 1

Friendship Force's World Friendship Day is observed by FFI each year on March 1st. It marks the date the organization was officially established in 1977. Now, every March 1st is an opportunity to honor the connections that enrich our lives.

We are looking for an enthusiastic leader to spearhead the event, bringing together creativity and enthusiasm to make it memorable. The ideal candidate will organize activities, foster connections, and ensure everyone feels included in this heartfelt celebration. Let's come together to cherish friendships and create lasting memories! [Learn More](#) about this important day in our history and lead us in a celebration at 3pm on Sunday, March 1, at [La Rumba Restaurant Latino](#) in Asheville. **RSVP to Tessa by February 26 if you are interested in going to this event.**

2026 FFWNC Board Members

President - Tessa Levizon
President-Elect - Vacant
Past President - Vacant
Secretary - Kay Manley
Treasurer - Susan Harvey
Directors 2026
Susan Gaston, Marti Wilmering (updated)
Directors 2026-27
Sue Davis, Larry McGaughy (updated)
Director 2026-28
Dick Weaver (new)

Club Member Birthdays

February
27 Diane Colvin
28 Jan Partin
March
9 Jay Ruzak
15 Cindy Razak
19 Chuck Elston
April
2 Susan Gaston
20 Kay Manley, Jack Mullen

Meet Our New Members



Diane Colvin

I am a happy traveler catching up on adventures I could never do before. Travel brings all my favorite things together with fun, food, new cultures, history, photography and friends. I've had many jobs in my past and fancy myself to be a female Anthony Bourdain, rest his soul. The common thread in work was customer service and I worked in multiple roles in the US military in a few different services over 37 years, with only 9 of them being active duty. Being a Veteran created a family of sorts for me along with my love of dogs; no kids, just furbabies. I am a huge nature lover, all plants and animals and am well versed in horticulture too. I like music a lot, lean towards Rock and variations of that. I'm pretty independent but like being part of a team too. I am loving being retired with my time being my own now.



Diane Jennette

I came here to WNC from Florida in Dec 2025. I moved here to be close to my daughter and her family. I live in Hendersonville. I am a semi-retired nursing professor. I served almost 11 years in the Air Force. I was fortunate to see California (2 yrs), Philippines (2 yrs), Korea, Thailand, Japan, Alaska (the last 4 were just TDY (temporary duty), Texas (2 yrs), and England (4 yrs). I was a medical service specialist and upon discharge I returned to school for nursing. I hit every rung on my ladder of success (CNA, LPN, RN, BSN, MSN, DNP-Doctor of Nursing Practice). I am excited to get to know everyone, explore WNC, get involved in our club, and experience other cultures! Thank you everyone for such a warm welcome at our last meeting. Everyone made me feel welcomed.



Pat Malinak

I have lived in Henderson County for 30 years and started hiking the forests here a week after arrival. Hiking continues to be my major passion along with my participation in the activities of Hendo Fun Friends ([meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com)). I have traveled to all 50 states plus 18+ foreign countries, so I am looking forward to finding travel companions as well as hosting foreign visitors for exploring our natural wonders and unique culture.

Now Is a Good Time to Set Up Your Calendar for the Year**

Board Meetings - usually held on the second Tuesday of each month, **except June 9 meeting will be on June 2 and the Sept. 8 meeting will be on Sept. 1****

General Meetings - usually held on the third Sunday of odd months, **except Sept. 19 meeting will be Oct. 11**.**

Annual Picnic – usually held on the second Saturday in July with the general meeting.

Book Club - usually meets quarterly on the fourth Friday (Jan, Apr, Jul, Oct).

Happy Hour - usually meets at 4:30 pm on the third Wednesday of each month at a local brewery or winery; hosts vary **new format**

Holiday Party – usually held the second Sunday in December

Pass the Spoon (lunch) - usually held on even months; dates and hosts vary.

2026 Committees

We're excited to share that many of our members have taken the initiative to step into various roles for 2026! However, we still need more volunteers to join committees and engage in club activities. If you see areas for improvement or have ideas for new events, we want to hear from you. It's the dedication of all our members that will make our club vibrant and relevant. Here are some opportunities for those eager to lead us into 2026. Complete the [FFWNC Member Survey 2026](#) to share your insights and talents!

Standing Committees

Bylaws/ Policy & Procedures – Dick Weaver, **need 2 more**

Communications - vacant

Email Blasts - Kay Manley

Publicity – Marlene Beggs, **need 1 more**

Newsletter – Diane Jeannette (chair), Marlene Beggs, Dick Weaver, Marti Wilmering

Social Media - vacant

FFWNC Website – Dick Weaver, **need 1 more**

FFWNC Facebook – Dick Weaver, Marti Wilmering,

FFI Website – Tessa Levizon, Susan Harvey

FFI Facebook – Marti Wilmering

Photographer – Diane Colvin

Journey – Susan Harvey, Larry McGaughy, **need 1**

Membership - Dick Weaver (chair), Susan Gaston, Harriett Hilton, Margie Weaver

Nominating - vacant until Summer **3-5 members**

Happy Hour Format Change

Happy Hour will be held each month on the **third Wednesday** (note day change) at 4:30pm using the Pass the Spoon model. Each month will be organized by a member who will choose the location. We need someone to prepare each month's description for the newsletter, Facebook, and email blast.

FFWNC Club Website: www.ffwesternnc.org

FFI Website: <https://friendshipforce.org/>

FFWNC Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100068029789039> (reopening soon)

FFI Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1419216651619189>

FFWNC Mailing Address: FFWNC, P.O. Box 384, Hendersonville, NC 28793

Other Committees

Archive – Chuck Elston, **need 1 more**

Grant - Ellen Brazauskas, Ivan Beggs, Sarah Poppenhouse

Social Activities - vacant

Book Club – Harriett Hilton

Happy Hour – **need 1 (see below)**

Holiday Party (December 13) – **need 1**

Hospitality – Lisa Breton, **need 1 more**

Outdoor Adventures: **need 2**

Pass the Spoon – Ellen Brazauskas, **need 1 more**

Special Events – **need 2**

Summer Picnic (July 11) – **need 1**

Sunshine – **need 1**

World Friendship Day (March 1) – Tessa Levizon, **need 1 more**

2027 Outbound Journey Preferences Submitted to FFI

First Preference - Costa Rica, France

Second Preference - Costa Rica, Japan

Your Feedback is Important to Us!

We want to make our club more responsive to members but need your help. [FFWNC Suggestion Box](#)