



friendship force  
WESTERN  
NORTH CAROLINA

# Mountain Friends

Volume 26, Issue 5 August/September 2026

Diane Jennette and Dick Weaver, editors

## President's Message / Tessa Levizon

Dear Members,

As we embrace the hottest days of summer, Friendship Force of Western North Carolina is heating up even more with the addition of nine new members this year—talk about being on fire!

We have even more exciting news. We are submitting a preliminary application for federal funding through the Congressional Office for International Leadership initiative. This is a wonderful opportunity to welcome international visitors to our community, particularly those interested in agritourism.

Our region has a rich agricultural history, beautiful farms, and stunning orchards that attract visitors from near and far. We are also fortunate to have club members with grant-writing expertise and firsthand experience in agritourism. I will not name names, but you know who you are—and we sincerely thank you!

I encourage everyone to connect at our next gathering, just as we did during our recent picnic. A special thank-you goes to everyone who helped organize the picnic and to Sarah Poppenhouse for leading such a wonderful mixer.

There will be many more opportunities to discover the interests and talents of our members at Pass the Spoon, Happy Hour, hiking outings, and other activities. There is always room for additional ideas, such as bowling, movie nights, game nights, and day trips.

I look forward to seeing everyone soon—and to the cooler weather of fall!

*Warm regards,*

**Tessa Levizon**

President, FFWNC

## Calendar at a Glance

### August

#### 8/6 (Thu.) – Happy Hour

4:30–6:00 p.m. | [Trailside Brewing](#), 873 Lennox Park Drive, Hendersonville

#### 8/11 (Tue.) – Board Meeting

10:00–11:30 a.m. | NC Cooperative Extension, 1000 Jackson Park Road, Hendersonville

#### 8/12 (Wed.) – Pass the Spoon

11:00 a.m. | [The Local Table](#), 1307 7<sup>th</sup> Av E, H'ville

#### 8/27 (Thu.) – Journey Coordinator Training

10am - noon | NC Cooperative Extension, 1000 Jackson Park Road, Hendersonville

### September

#### 9/3 (Thu.) – Happy Hour

4:30–6:00 p.m. | Location TBD

#### 9/8 (Tue.) – Board Meeting

10:00–11:30 a.m. | NC Cooperative Extension, 1000 Jackson Park Road, Hendersonville

#### 9/17–9/23 – Outbound Journey to Napa/Sonoma

##### – General Meeting Update

The September General Meeting has been rescheduled for October 11 to coincide with the Orlando Inbound Journey.

### October

#### 10/1 (Thu.) – Happy Hour

4:30–6:00 p.m. | Location TBD

#### 10/6–10/12 – Inbound Journey from Orlando

#### 10/11 (Sun.) – General Meeting

3:00–5:00 p.m. | Location TBD | with Orlando Inbound Journey

#### 10/13 (Tue.) – Board Meeting

10:00–11:30 a.m. | NC Cooperative Extension, 1000 Jackson Park Road, Hendersonville

#### Date TBD – Pass the Spoon

11:00 a.m. | Location TBD | Hosted by the August winner

#### 10/23 (Fri.) – Quarterly Book Club

1:30 p.m. | [Mayflower](#) by Nathaniel Philbrick location TBD

General information about meeting dates is available through the [Regularly Scheduled Club Events](#) link.

## Membership Focus / Dick Weaver

A successful membership effort starts with the **recruitment of new members** through a dynamic social media presence and member-driven referral of potential members.

Sue Gaston will host a casual/informal social gathering in her home on August 8 to share the Friendship Force story with new and prospective members. It will be a chance to get to know each other better and provide more information about our club and answer questions.

Are you willing to identify at least one potential member each month? It's easy - just submit their name on the [Prospective New Member Referral Form](#) and let us do the rest!

You can start by sharing [What is Friendship Force?](#) with a friend. Check out this video of Ivan Beggs and me at our picnic that shows how you might go about [Sharing Our Story](#).

Perhaps even more important to a successful membership effort is the **retention of new and existing members**. This includes new member orientation (see above), mentoring, and engaging new and existing members in club activities and committees. Just being a friend with a common interest of promoting understanding, cultural education and citizen diplomacy through home stay journeys and friendships goes a long way in retaining our members.

I will be sending out a survey later this month that will seek to engage members in membership recruitment and retention efforts. **Please respond so we can continue the momentum we have developed this year.**

## Pass the Spoon Lunch / Ellen Brazauskas

The August "Pass the Spoon" will be at 11am on Wednesday, August 12 at [The Local Table](#), 1307 7<sup>th</sup> Av E in Hendersonville, hosted by Tessa Levizon. Plan to join us for this lively event.

## Memorial – Gerri Gurbuz



It is with sadness that we announce the passing of former FFWNC member, Gerri Gurbuz. Gerri was a member of our club from 2019 until 2025. She served on the Board of Directors and was a founding member of the book club. She traveled

with us on several Journeys and hosted on inbound journeys and COIL experiences. She had a heart for international travel and loved people. She will be missed. [obituary](#)

## Journey Coordinators Needed/ Susan Harvey

We have **four** journeys for 2027! Outbound to Mid-Willamette Valley, OR and San Jose, Costa Rica and Inbound from Lincoln, NE and a special outdoor adventure journey with Richmond, VA, Raleigh, NC and WNC. Now we need journey coordinators to make these journeys happen!!

The Ambassador/ Host Coordinator is one of the most important Friendship Force leadership roles. It is also one of the most rewarding. As an Ambassador or Host Coordinator, you are the "face" of FFI. As Coordinator for a Journey, you are responsible for planning the Journey, recruiting ambassadors/hosts, and leading the experience.

- **Haven't had the Journey Coordinator training?** No problem. We have scheduled a training / refresher course on Thursday August 27 from 10am – noon (new date and time).
- **Never done it before?** Don't worry. We will schedule you with a veteran coordinator so you can learn the ropes!

Please take advantage of this opportunity to make our journeys the **BEST EVER!** Contact Susan Harvey if you need further information or have questions. [Click to Apply](#)

## Monthly Happy Hour / Karen Brown



The August Happy Hour will be held on Thursday, August 6 at 4:30pm at [Trailside Brewing](#), 873 Lennox Park Drive, Hendersonville, hosted by Karen Brown. Come get out of the heat and join your friends from Friendship Force for conversation, food, and a drink (optional).

## Nominating Committee Gearing up for Fall Elections!

The nominating Committee is one of the most important committees in the club. They identify and recruit the leadership for the club for the coming year(s). They are instrumental in shaping our future! This year's committee consists of Marti Wilmering, Susan Harvey and Sabrina Pittillo. They will be reaching out to members as they prepare the slate of officers and directors to be elected in November. When your phone rings and they ask for your consent to serve, please thoughtfully consider and say yes. Remember, we need each member to do their part to keep FFWNC growing and thriving!

## Club Member Birthdays

### August

7 – Betty Doll

### September

7 – Brad Jacobs

10 – Marti Wilmering

16 – Diane Jennette

### October

8 – Margie Weaver

14 – Karen McDonald

31 – Mike Brazauskas

## From The Archives / Chuck Elston and Dick Weaver

As many of you know, I have accumulated about four cubic feet of historical club materials (roughly four storage boxes) over the years. These documents tell the story of our club—its adventures, accomplishments, leadership, and the people who helped shape it. Unfortunately, after this year, I will no longer be able to continue managing this collection.

After exploring several options with the Board, we have concluded that the best way to preserve and share this history is to digitize as much of it as possible and make it available on the FFWNC website. Materials may include board meeting minutes, journey reports, newsletters, and newspaper articles. We have not yet determined the best way to preserve memorabilia and other items that cannot be easily scanned.

This is a significant undertaking, but it is also a unique opportunity to ensure that decades of club history are not lost and remain accessible to current and future members. The more volunteers we have, the more quickly and efficiently we can complete this project.

If you are willing to help, please contact Dick Weaver. When you respond, please let him know whether you have access to a scanner, especially one that can scan multiple-page documents.

Our club's history belongs to all of us. With a little help from many hands, we can preserve these stories, memories, and records for generations to come. Thank you for being part of this effort, it truly will take a village!

## Ottawa Canada Journey June 6 - 14, 2026 / Ellen Brazauskas

Twelve Friendship Force of Western North Carolina Ambassadors enjoyed a memorable June 7–13 exchange with Friendship Force of Ottawa, featuring a welcome breakfast, museums, a boat cruise, Parliament, the RCMP, the Diefenbaker, and a dairy distillery. A weather cancellation led to a fun morning of **5-pin bowling** and Canadian treats. The journey concluded with a visit to Beechwood National Cemetery and a memorable farewell dinner with their Canadian hosts. [Read More About Journey](#) [Ottawa Journey Report Video- Susan Harvey](#) [Chinese Chicken Salad Recipe](#)

## Upcoming Journeys / Susan Harvey

### 2026 Journeys

- Napa/Sonoma Outbound Journey will be September 17-23. Contact Susan Harvey, Journey Coordinator, for last-minute openings.
- Inbound Orlando journey will be October 6-12 - There are plenty of opportunities to participate in home, dinner and day hosting. Many hands make light work—and more fun! Contact Journey Coordinator Harriett Hilton to get involved.

### 2027 Inbound Journeys

- Special outdoor adventure journey hosted by Richmond, VA, Raleigh, NC and WNC. WNC April 18-22
- Lincoln, NE. October?

### 2027 Outbound Journeys

- Mid-Willamette Valley, OR June?
- San Jose, Costa Rica August?

## Recap of Recent Club Activities

Information and photographs from recent club activities are posted on the FFWNC Facebook Page. Be sure to visit the page for photographs and highlights from the club's June journey to Ottawa.

## Your Feedback Is Important to Us!

We want to make our club more responsive to members, but we need your help. Please share your ideas through the FFWNC Suggestion Box.

## Look for Email Blasts About Upcoming Events

Kay Manley will send periodic email blasts about events occurring within the next seven to ten days. Be sure to add her email address to your contacts so you do not miss these important announcements.

## Looking for a Fun Get Together??

Marti Wilmering would like to identify members to join her for an informal game night at a local Hendersonville venue. Contact her if interested.

## New Nametags Available



## Your Name Here

### Western North Carolina

A fresh FFWNC nametag design is now available, featuring the updated FFI logo and current branding. Now is an ideal moment to secure your own for our upcoming club events, such as the outbound journey to Napa/Sonoma or the inbound journey from Orlando. To place your order, simply send a note specifying exactly how you would like your name to be displayed, along with a \$15 check payable to FFWNC, and mail to FFWNC Treasurer at PO Box 384, Hendersonville, NC 28793 by August 15.

TIP: Have you ever forgotten to bring your Friendship Force nametag? Keep it in your car so it will always be with you for FFWNC activities, especially during inbound journeys.

## Contact Information for Club Members Listed in This Newsletter

To protect members' privacy, contact information is available on the members-only page of the FFWNC website or in the 2026 Membership Directory. Please consult the directory for instructions on accessing the website or ask another club member for assistance. ***Any personal information contained in this newsletter will be removed before being published on our website.***

## Newsletter Deadline

Please submit information to Diane Jennette no later than September 15 for inclusion in the October/November newsletter.

## Meet Our Newest Members

Biographies of FFWNC members will be *removed before being published on our website.*

## Important Links

### Friendship Force International Links

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

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

FFI Orientation and Training: [FFI Online Training](#)

### Friendship Force of Western North Carolina Links

FFWNC Club Website: [www.ffwesternnc.org](http://www.ffwesternnc.org)

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

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

### Member Forms

FFWNC Newsletter, Website, or Other Ideas: [FFWNC Suggestion Box](#)

New Member Referral: [Prospective New Member Form](#)

Membership Application: [FFWNC Membership Application](#)

**Member Contact Info:** Available on FFWNC Club Website Member Page or in FFWNC Directory

[Regularly Scheduled Club Events](#)

[2026 FFWNC Board Members](#)

[2026 Committee Assignments](#)

### Previous Mountain Friends Newsletters

January 2026 [Newsletter 2026-01.pdf](#)

February/March 2026 [Newsletter-2026-0203-web.pdf](#)

April/May 2026 [Newsletter-2026-0405-web.pdf](#)

June/July 2026 [Newsletter 2026-0607-web.pdf](#)