

Historian's Report – First Half Year 2021

By Mary Verschuur

The first three months of 2021 could be characterized by the phrase “Reinventing Our Club”. Although we welcomed the opportunities to get vaccinated for Covid 19 and felt safer for having received the shots, we were still a long way from being out of the woods as far as travel and hosting were concerned.

FFL's board continued to meet virtually. The monthly breakfasts and happy hours were also held throughout the quarter, online of course, while three invitations to gather in person for a stroll around Gateway Mall provided for an outing and a chance to see one another “live”.

However, overall, re-inventing became the new mantra. FFL and FFI have moved ahead in offering the membership numerous ways to connect virtually and to stay in touch with one another within our club as well as across the national organization. Virtual became the keyword. Local members at FFL have shared their past journeys on line. FFI did likewise. Trivia nights became popular, both within our club and in conjunction with other clubs. Additionally FFI's “Stay Safe While Travelling” whetted our appetites for more “nomadic” days.

The club's newsletter “Passports” came out online on February 2nd and contained, among other things, a breakdown of the membership survey, conducted and collated by Maxine Moul in which about half the club's membership participated. Likewise, about half the members made up gift bags for the Center for People in Need instead of our holiday party. Membership for 2021 dropped off about 20% from 2020 leaving the club with 88 members for 2021.

One further innovation rolled out on March 13th, 2021, was FFI's new “my.friendshipforce.com”. This online tool connecting all members is intended to promote greater privacy, make communication across clubs more fluid and uniform, and comply with current privacy rules. One major benefit highlighted by our president is that this new resource will make web hosting available to local clubs. This will make having a web presence less costly than it has been up to now.

The Second quarter of 2021 saw many of the COVID-imposed restrictions being withdrawn or mitigated, allowing all of us, including FFL, more opportunities for in-person events and activities. The second Saturday breakfast at Stauffer's was one of the first events to meet in person. LEO was quick to follow with its first gathering in over a year in May. A talk was given by the owner of the Afro-Caribbean restaurant, Stur 22, then members took their meals to a nearby park to enjoy a picnic together. Breakfasts and LEO gatherings have continued in person throughout the summer.

Virtual journeys remained a staple through May when finally, a journey calendar for the Midwest Region for 2022 became available. Once again members could begin planning and anticipating journeys and hosting inbound guests.

A club-sponsored walk in Pioneer's Park attracted a good turn-out in May and the social justice committee, in conjunction with the Unitarian Church, sponsored a live (or Zoom) speaker in June. The club's Newsletter, Passport, full of members' stories, was published online in May as was the 2021 Membership Directory. A revised tri-fold, color brochure for our club with updated content and photographs was also made available.

The FFL board continued to meet via Zoom with hopes to resume in-person meetings in through September. Meanwhile, the AGM was postponed until later in the fall. (No date is available as of this writing). The Annual Meeting has been set for September 19 outdoors. The board continued to urge its members to join the FFI website in order to have access to all the information regarding all of the events sponsored by and undertaken by Friendship Force. FFI also put out a call for nominations to its board of directors. t

Mary B. Verschuur July 2021