



# PASSPORT

A Publication of the Friendship Force of Lincoln  
[www.fflincoln.org](http://www.fflincoln.org)

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March 2026

## Iowa and St. Louis Friendship Clubs View Sandhills Cranes

**By Arlene Rea**

Eighteen Midwesterners observed more than one million Sandhill Cranes the evening of Tuesday, March 10, and again on Wednesday morning, March 11. The meetups were at the Crane Trust, near Alda, and at the Audubon Rowe Sanctuary, near Gibbon. Both sites are on the Platte River. Ten Friendship Force members from Grand Rapids and Des Moines in Iowa, and St. Louis, Missouri, joined eight Friendship Force members from Lincoln.

On the evening of March 11, the 18 ambassadors had a very close observation, in pre-paid blinds, of the groups of cranes as they circled the area to find their roosting places for the night in the waters of the Platte. The birds had come in from the foraging sites, corn and milo fields, several miles away.



**Cedar Rapids, Des Moines and St. Louis Friendship Force members joined Lincoln for a Sandhills Crane Journey.**



On Wednesday morning, at 4:45 a.m., ambassadors went to their cars to find 3 to 4 inches of snow covering them. Through blowing, and sometimes blinding snow, the ambassadors made their way to the Rowe Audubon Sanctuary near Gibbon, about 40 miles west on I-80, again in pre-paid blinds. Because of the snow and cloudiness, the birds weren't in a big hurry to leave for the nearby fields for another day of eating. Several flocks left, but returned and landed. At the Crane Visitor Center, we learned from a photographer that the reason for the return to the roosting site was that six bald eagles were waiting on the bank to attack. By 9 a.m., the birds had mostly dispersed to the nearby fields, but the eagles remained.

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**At the Crane Trust at Alda are Elese Johnson, Judy and John Miner of Cedar Rapids, IA.**

## From the FFL President, March 2026

By Judy Keetle, President

Thank you for putting your trust in me to lead FFL for another year. With your involvement, 2026 will be a great year. The motto of Friendship Force is ‘a world of friends is a world of peace.’ I look forward to getting to know each of you friends even better this year.

Last year I participated in three FF journeys. In August I joined a journey from Australia to Cedar Rapids, IA to meet with people I met when I traveled to Australia and New Zealand with the Cedar Rapids club a few years ago. In October I went to Vietnam and Cambodia with the FFI ‘Festival on the Mekong’. In November I traveled with FFL friends to Sarasota, FL. In all three cases I enjoyed getting to know people who share the FF attributes of friendliness, adventurousness, openness, and life-long learning. Traveling to other countries and cities is a good way to participate in Friendship Force. Check out the journeys listed on the FFI website to travel with FFL or with other clubs.



Judy Keetle

There are many ways to participate in FFL right here in Lincoln.

1. Sign up to be on a FFL committee.
2. Host and/or participate in activities with ambassadors to Lincoln. Last year we hosted people from the country of Romania and the Columbia Cascade area in the US.
3. Attend the monthly Breakfast and Conversation on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday of each month at 8:30 at Stauffer’s Café and Pie Shoppe. Bring a friend.
4. Enjoy meals from various cultures at the LEOs (Let’s Eat Out). Bring a friend.
5. Follow the FFL website [fflincoln.org](http://fflincoln.org), the FFI website for members only at [my.friendshipforce.org](http://my.friendshipforce.org), and FFL’s Facebook page.
6. Participate in Welcome and Farewell activities for incoming journeys.
7. Attend the programs put on by ambassadors who have traveled on an FF journey.
8. Attend board meetings.
9. Participate in cultural activities available to members..
10. Agree to be a FFL officer or committee chair.

This year, Vice President Ann Quinlan, Past President Arlene Rea, and I are working together to make decisions. Most committees this year have co-chairs so the jobs can be shared. We will continue programs and committees that have been successful in the past, as well as look for new ways to bring value to FFL members. Your ideas and input are always welcome.

**In friendship,  
Judy Keetle, FFL 2026 President**

## Upcoming Birthday Celebrations for Friendship Force Members

4/23 - Prudence Coccodrilli  
4/27 - John Comer  
5/5 - Jacque Scholz

5/9 - Bridget Disney  
6/2 - Susan Pierce  
6/7 - Susan Grieger

6/7 - Lee Rockwell  
6/29 - Cathy Lund  
6/30 - Dorina Mahler

## World Friendship Day Celebrated at the Asian Cultural Center

World Friendship Day is Celebrated on March 1 each year. Friendship Force International was founded by Wayne Smith and introduced by President Jimmy Carter and mayors of many US cities on March 1, 1977.

Since then, the organization has held true to the ideals of bringing people together, promoting peace, and has facilitated millions of new friendships throughout the world. The motto of Friendship Force is ‘a world of friends is a world of peace’.

This year Friendship Force of Lincoln celebrated World Friendship Day on Thursday, February 26 at the Asian Community and Cultural Center. Lisa Guill, Director of Communications, and Rebecca Reinhardt, community Coordinator, shared how the Asian Community Center functions and several of the activities in which FFL members could participate. (see the calendar in this Passport for details)

After enjoying refreshments provided by FFL Board members, we enjoyed getting to know each other better by interviewing a partner, asking some prepared questions, and then introducing our partner to the group.



The meeting started by reciting the Friendship Force Pledge and ended by singing the Friendship Force version of “Let There Be Peace on Earth”.

**Staff at the Asian Community and Cultural Center met with members of the FFL Diversity and Community Service Committee.**

## Friendship Force International Changes Dues Structure

In early 2027 Friendship Force International (FFI) will celebrate its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary since its founding on March 1, 1997.

In October 2025, FFI launched its “Membership for All: A Global Equity Initiative”. This initiative is designed to implement a new global membership dues structure across cultures. This structure aims to balance the financial realities of our members around the world while supporting the long-term growth and operational stability of FFI. There will be a three year roll out of the new membership model.

So far, this program has affected Friendship Force of Lincoln (FFL) in the following ways:

1. Dues for FFI members in the USA are now \$100.
  - a.) FFL 2026 dues (\$30 to FFI and \$20 to FFL) had already been set at our annual meeting on September 21, 2025.
  - b.) On January 5, 2026 the FFL Board approved a motion to transfer \$70 per 2026 member from the FFL scholarship fund to cover the difference between 2026 dues of \$30 already paid and the now \$100 dues to FFI. This was basically a \$70 one-time scholarship to each FFL member for 2026. Members were offered the option to reimburse the FFL scholarship fund. The FFL dues remain at \$20.
  - c.) After 2026, FFI dues will be \$100 per year to be paid directly to FFI. Each member can choose to pay \$8.66 monthly or \$100 annually.
  - d.) FFL dues will be collected annually by our Treasurer.
2. We have been notified of FFI changes that are coming soon.
  - a.) FFI branding guidelines and template
  - b.) Additions to the Help Center
  - c.) Marketing Toolkit for Clubs: materials for clubs to access to help with recruitment to be delivered every other month
  - d.) New FFI brochure that can be customized for each local club
  - e.) Presentation slide deck, social media packet

We will keep you informed of changes as we move forward. The motto of Friendship Force is still *‘a world of friends is a world of peace’* which is a worthy goal in the world today.

## FFL Members Have Variety of Activities Available on Calendar

April 6, Mon – FFL Board Meeting

April 11, Sat – Breakfast and Conversation

April 23, Thurs – LEO at 5 pm

April 24, Fri – Untold Migrant Stories

May 2, Sat – American and Pacific Islander  
Heritage Celebration

May 4, Mon – FFL Board Meeting

May 9, Sat – Breakfast and Conversation

May 19, Tues – LEO at 1:00 pm

June 1, Mon – FFL Board Meeting

June 6, Sat – Cultural Bazaar

June 13, Sat – Breakfast and Conversation

June 25, Thurs – LEO at 5 pm

## Cranes Journey

Continued from page 1

On Monday, March 9, in the afternoon, the ambassadors toured the Nebraska Public Media building, viewed the award-winning film *Crane Song*, and met with the producer, Perry Stoner. Later, at Lee's Chicken, the group enjoyed a traditional midwestern dinner of fried chicken and mashed potatoes. They learned more about bird habitats from Larkin Powell, the director of the School of Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska.

On Tuesday, the group stopped at the Stuhr Museum in Grand Island and took a guided tour of the Sandhill Crane art display and the museum. They later drove through the fields where the Sandhill Cranes were foraging after visiting the Crane Trust Visitor Center. Ambassadors checked into a Grand Island hotel and left for the evening viewing at Crane Trust.

After the blind visit, the group visited the Archway, which documents the history and development of the interstate system, proposed by President Eisenhower, across the United States.

Later, they visited the Museum of Nebraska Art in Kearney. On the way back to Lincoln on Thursday, stops were made at the Edgerton Explorit Center in Aurora, where Mary Molliconi presented the history of Dr. Edgerton and Strobe Alley, and at the Mennonite Village in Henderson, where ambassadors enjoyed a traditional Mennonite lunch and tour.

### Lincoln Friendship Force Members Contributed to Crane Journey's Success

FFL members who made this journey possible were: Julie Albrecht (home host), Phyllis Arth (home host), Milt and Gayle Bayer (home hosts), Midge Dublinske (pre-journey coordinator), Wendy Horacek (home host assigner), Carol Johnstone-Hornig (home host), Eloise Hiatt (co-coordinator and home host), Judy Keetle (co-coordinator), Pat Novak (Resource Journey Coordinator), Ann Quinlan, Arlene Rea (co-coordinator), and Jan Sibal (home host).



**Sandhills Cranes on their Platte River roosting area  
Journey participants saw the cranes in both early  
morning and evening.**

## Building Peace and Friendship at a Local Level

By Janet Walters, Phyllis Arth, Co-Chairs

Friendship Force Lincoln's Diversity and Community Service Committee adapts Friendship Force International's strategy for building peace and friendship and applies it at a local level. On its website, Friendship Force International shares that "One of the best ways to promote global understanding across the barriers that separate people is to host an ambassador in your home. Show them your community, city, country and culture, and learn about theirs over meals, laughter, and shared experiences."

(<https://friendshipforce.org/>)

Our Diversity and Community Service Committee strives to connect with people from around the world who live right here in Lincoln and host them in our homes. In 2025-2026 we are working with the Lincoln Asian Community and Cultural Center (<https://www.lincolnasiancenter.org/>). We have offered two gatherings in our homes and have three more planned. We have learned from and enjoyed becoming acquainted with staff and people served by the Asian Center. Food has been shared and information has been gathered on ways Friendship Force Lincoln might support the needs of the Asian Center. One example was the 'Spice Drive' that many of our members participated in during December. Five large boxes of spices were gathered, and we have been informed that all were appreciated and distributed to people served by the Asian Center prior to the end of 2025.



## LEO Restaurants, Dates Set for 2026

By Bruce and Carlene Keim and Prudence Coccodrill

The schedule for Let's Eat Out has been set for 2026:

- Japon Bistro 3520 Village Drive Wednesday March 18th at 5:00pm
- El Chaparro Mexican 900 south 13th Thursday April 23rd at 5:00pm
- Main Street Market in Milford Ne. 115 Hwy 6 Tuesday May 19th at 1:00pm for lunch
- Asian Taste 501 West A Street Thursday June 25th 5:00pm
- Ginger Grill 6055 Apples Way Saturday July 18th 11:30am for lunch
- Pinoy Style Filipino American 1601 Q Street Monday August 24th at 5:00pm

Please let LEO co-chairs Bruce and Carlene Keim know if you have any suggestions for ethnic restaurants that you recommend for our FFL members. [Carlene33@gmail.com](mailto:Carlene33@gmail.com) or [brucelkeim@gmail.com](mailto:brucelkeim@gmail.com).

## Journeys, COIL Will Give Domestic, International Opportunities

Another COIL group, this one from Hungary, is scheduled for September 2026. More information will be available this summer. Committee Chair Julie Albrecht will be requesting home hosts for about five visitors.

Domestic Journeys in 2026 will possibly be to St. Louis and Des Moines. No details have yet been received. An international Journey to Canada this June was cancelled because of lack of interest by both the Cheyenne, WY and Lincoln Friendship Force members.

## 2025 Activities Reported by FFL Historian

By Phyllis Arth

2025 was a year of contrasts for Friendship Force Lincoln and our place in the world, and our 45<sup>th</sup> year as a member of Friendship Force International. Our club emphasized local and international cooperation and peaceful communication. FFI announced a new online accounting system, increased dues and set different due dates.

It was a difficult year for our faithful leader, Arlene Rea. VP Midge Dublinske accepted leadership as President Rea dealt with her husband's illness and death, plus hip and wrist fractures with hospitalization in a rehabilitation center, followed by the death of her sister. Midge took over the presidency with ease, even when she was very new to Friendship Force.

In addition to regular duties, the Board accomplished new projects: created a survey that was returned by 39 members to determine each member's level of interest and involvement; created a new grant for need-based dues; attended Midwest Leadership zoom meetings; are making plans to attend the North American Conference in Memphis TN in 2026; and Board minutes were posted on FFLincoln.org website. VP Dublinske chaired the Scholarship Committee and Bylaws and Policies Committee, met with members from Friendship Force of Wichita, assisted with inbound journeys, and attended club social events.

Judy Keetle collected and compiled a binder of letters, presented to President Rea, in appreciation of her double terms as President and her years of service to FFL.

2025 Executive Committee members were President Arlene Rea in her second term; Vice President Midge Dublinski, second year; Secretary Ann Quinlan, fifth year; Treasurer Milt Bayer, ninth year; and Past President Judy Keetle.

### STANDING COMMITTEES

**BREAKFAST AND CONVERSATION** Marilyn Watson. Met monthly, second Saturdays, 8:30am, Stauffer's Restaurant. About eight regularly attend. Leslie Ryan joined as co-chair.

**COIL/OPEN WORLD** Julie Albrecht and Judy Keetle. Hosted civic leaders from Romania, August 8-16. The five delegates were elected deputy mayors of their cities who were here to learn more about local government. Maxine Moul provided an article in the Lincoln Journal Star. The weeklong program was so well received that a group from Hungary requested - and will - study the same topic in 2026. FFL has offered an Open World/COIL experience every year since about 1990 with Julie Albrecht as chair most years.

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# 2025 Activities Reported by FFL Historian

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**DIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY SERVICE (DCSC)** Janet Walters and Phyllis Arth. **Members** Nancy Comer, Maxine Moul, Ann Quinlan, Vickie McDonald, Linda Kistler, Pat Novak, Jacque Scholz, Sylvia Crilly, and Barb Ritter, **Asian Community and Cultural Center** Lisa Guill, **Board Liaison** Arlene Rea, FFL President, and **Social Committee Liaison** Julie Splichal. The Committee continued to work with the Muslim community through early 2025. A meeting was held with Muslim women to determine interest in creating a local group of individuals interested in maintaining connections with FFL on the local level. It was decided to call the group Friends of Friendship Force.



The Committee met in February and selected the Asian Community and Cultural Center as the next Lincoln population that we would reach out to as we seek to build understanding and friendship on a local level. Lisa Guill, the Director of Communications for the Asian Community and Cultural Center, and also the Welcoming Communities Coordinator for the Cultural Centers of Lincoln agreed to be the liaison with our committee. After meeting with the Asian Center staff and hearing about their issues and ideas, it was decided that Friendship Force Lincoln would become a partner at Welcoming Week to welcome refugees, immigrants, and other new arrivals to our community.

We held our first gathering in our homes in December and will hold three more in 2026. We are inviting Asian Center staff and clients to share with us their concerns and experiences as new Lincoln residents. Following our first gathering, it was decided that the Committee would sponsor a Spice Drive at the FFL Holiday meeting and donate the spices to clients of the Asian Center. The drive was successful, and about \$500 worth of spices were delivered in mid-December.

Other activities held during the year included hosting representatives from ECHO Collective who presented following the Jan. 6<sup>th</sup> Board Meeting. Jessica Gebers (ECHO Collective Outreach) spoke on the history and mission of the organization. To help board members understand the experience of the women participating in their program, Jessica interviewed Bia Espinoza (an individual who went through the entrepreneurship program at ECHO Collective and started her own business, Susa’s Sweets and Balloons). Bia provided refreshments for the 2025 annual meeting.

In addition to working with the Muslim and Asian communities, the DCSC provided information to FFL at various local festivals and events that were offered by the varied cultures and groups that make up Lincoln. Various committee members also supported the work of other committees and served as home hosts, day hosts, and participants in both inbound and planned outbound journeys. DCSC is maintaining a folder of its activities. Articles on the committee’s work were submitted to Arlene Rea and Maxine Moul for inclusion in the Passport newsletter.

**HISTORIAN** Phyllis Arth. Compiled this Report, her third year of service.

**JOURNEY RESOURCE COORDINATOR** Pat Novak, for the third year, coordinated the Inbound Journey for Columbia/Cascade. The 11 members rated the event as highly successful. September 23-30 involved six home hosts, six home dinners and five day drivers. More than 20 members attended the welcome and the farewell dinners. The Outbound Journey, to Sarasota, FL took place November 2-9. Hosts were given FFL pins. Friendships were made and Sarasota club is planning to Journey to FFL, 2027.

**OUTBOUND JOURNEY COORDINATOR** Maxine Moul. After much planning the Journey to Java, Indonesia was canceled. Communications were frequently sent, but details were not secure enough to travel. Club members were reluctant to do flights of 21-30 hours.

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## 2025 Activities Reported by FFL Historian

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**INBOUND JOURNEY COORDINATOR** Judy Keetle. The Kansas Club invited FFL to join them for dinner and socializing at Pizza Ranch in Lincoln, in June. Their club was recruiting new members with a road trip to see sites and museums in the Lincoln area. Friendships began in 2010 with their Journey to Lincoln. FFL joined Birmingham AL in a Journey to Sarasota, FL from November 5-9. Seven FFL members had a great time with home hosts and day hosts.

**FFI FIELD COORDINATOR** Lorie-Ann Scott. No report.

**LEO (LET'S EAT OUT)** Bruce and Carlene Keim. Eating out most alternate months, members sampled cuisine from Viet Nam, Middle East, India, Japanese, Afghanistan, Italy and Louisiana. An average of 15 members attended each dinner. The Keims have organized LEO's for about 10 years.

**MEMBERSHIP** Marilyn Watson. New members: Sylvia Crilly, Ted Larson, Carol Johnstone-Hornig. Deaths: respectful good-byes to Gloria Juhnke Dittman Van Akeren, a member for many years; and Jeannie Zweibel, a member since 1995.

**COURTESY** Gayle Bayer. Sent 16 cards, for joy and sympathy.

**DIRECTORY** Midge Dublinske. Updated and distributed via email.

**SCHOLARSHIP** Midge Dublinske and Board.

**ONLINE BIRTHDAY and HOLIDAY GREETINGS** JoEllen Polzien. Listed member birthdays in each Passport issue and sent musical email greetings for holidays to all members.

**PASSPORT NEWSLETTER** Maxine Moul, editor. This is the official club publication. Four issues were published, each 8-9 pages long. Interviews of officers and new members, Journey alerts and reports, and a summary of activities in the President's letter kept members informed.

**FACEBOOK** Vickie McDonald. The FB page is updated regularly, keeping up with FFL events. We have 550 followers from all over the world. <http://facebook.com/FFLincoln> Vickie has been chair for about four years.

**WEB SITE** Arlene Rea, Midge Dublinske maintain these internet sites. <https://fflincoln.org>, is extensive, with many helpful links, including Passports since 2009, a listing of the Board of Directors, important upcoming dates, ambassadors, membership and dues, travel, service grant applications, a list of Friendship Force International clubs and more. Recently updated applications for need-based Dues Grants and need-based Travel Grants are located here. **MEMBERS ONLY WEBPAGE:** To receive notices of journeys, book clubs, pen pals, etc. from Friendship Force International (FFI), log on to the members-only website.

**SOCIAL** Julie Splichal for 20 years,. Social committee coordinates with many other FFL committees. They organized the COIL dinner gathering in Crete NE, with 40 attending. At the September annual meeting, the cake came from ECHO Collective and ethnic/pioneer music was provided by Chris Sayre- through a grant from the Humanities Council; 32 attended. For the Holiday party, the committee prepared dozens of cookies, a present unwrapping game, and a scavenger hunt to highlight collections at the International Quilt Center. About 33 attended.

### AD HOC COMMITTEES

**AUDIT** Pat Novak and De Tonack completed the audit. They said it was not difficult because Treasurer Bayer is so organized and efficient. It was approved by email vote before the annual meeting.

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friendship force  
LINCOLN

# 2025 Activities Reported by FFL Historian

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**DAY TRIPS** Judy Keetle organized the June trip to the Benson area of Omaha.

**NOMINATING COMMITTEE** 2026 officers who were elected at the September 21 Annual Meeting: Judy Keetle, President; Ann Quinlan, Vice President; Carol Johnstone-Hornig, Secretary; Milt Bayer, Treasurer. Judy has served as president previously. Ann previously served as secretary and Milt has served nine terms as treasurer. Carol is a new member of Friendship Force of Lincoln (2025) and we welcome her into leadership of the club.

**POLICIES AND BYLAW REVIEW** Midge Dublinske, Arlene Rea, Judy Keetle and Ann Quinlan. Details were noted and updated. Discussed potential bylaw changes to allow for co-presidents or officers, term limits, dues and fundraising.

### UNIQUE HAPPENINGS

Vicki McDonald and Larry Harnish went to Georgia to be hosted by the investigative journalists they hosted, via the Open World/COIL program. The “round trip” experience is so unique that Vickie and Larry were invited to attend the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Open World/COIL to share about the experience. Another “round trip” experience happened when Judy Keetle and Sharre Jahde drove to join the Cedar Rapids-Iowa City club, who were hosting a delegation from FF Adelaide, Australia that included FF Aussie friends made when Judy and Sharre were in Australia in 2023.

Judy Keetle and Sharree Jahde really enjoyed FFI’s “Festival on the Mekong.”



**Judy Keetle traveled to Southeast Asia on the Friendship Force International cruise in 2025.**

**Vickie McDonald met with Senator Ben Nelson at the COIL meeting in Washington, DC.**



### RECOGNITION OF LONG-TERM MEMBERS

1980 Sharre Jahde, original member

1981 Laurie-Ann and Larry Scott

1983 Susan Pierce

1990 Jane Kinsey

1991 Jim Ecklund

1995 Jeanne Zwiebel, who died this year.

1997 Nancy and John Comer

1998 Kay and Lee Rockwell

1999 Julie Splichal

2003 Thomas Higley, Jan Sibal, Betty Starr

2004 Gayle and Milt Bayer, Loris Purtzer

2006 Julie Albrecht, Carlene and Bruce Keim

2007 Bill Behmer, Bridget Disney

2008 Wendy Horacek, Dorina Mahler, Barbara Ridder, Jacque Scholz, Nikki Scott

2009 Dorthy Anderson

**The Friendship Force of Lincoln Membership Application**  
**Friendship Force International and Friendship Force of Lincoln Dues**

**\$20 per person for Lincoln chapter**

**Dues for Friendship Force International will be paid on-line to FFI**

**Beginning in 2027 (\$100 per person)**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ New Member \_\_\_\_\_ Renewing Member \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Home Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Mobile Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Birthday: Month \_\_\_ Day \_\_\_ Would you like to receive an electronic birthday greeting? Y N

Does Friendship Force of Lincoln have your permission to use your photograph in brochures, media articles, website, Facebook, etc. to promote the Organization? Y N

New Members receive a complimentary name badge. Circle your choice: Pin Magnetic

**Ways I can help:** (Circle as many as you like)

Club supporter

Inbound Home Host

Activities Committee

Inbound Dinner Host

Open World (COIL) Committee

Journey Coordinator

Computer/Internet Skills

Officer Nominating Committee

Diversity & Community Service Committee

Passport Newsletter Formatting

Feature article writer for Passport or Neighborhood Extra

Speakers' Bureau

Social Committee

Future Officer

Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Make check for \$20 payable to: Friendship Force of Lincoln.**

**Send to Friendship Force, PO Box 30334, Lincoln, NE 68503**