

The Journal of an Outbound Exchange to Moldova August 27 to September 3, 2014

Wednesday, August 27, 2014 by Ralph and Jane Cauthen

Our arrival in Chisinau

We flew from Munich to Chisinau, arriving just before noon. "Early to bed and early to rise" to catch airport transportation at 6:45 a.m. It did not make us wealthier, and the verdict on health and wisdom is still pending. It did rain significantly on the loading passengers. Jealousy reigned as it rained on the just and unjust waiting to board. Ray gave consideration to breaking a leg to receive the special treatment Jane received from Lufthansa. Our leader, Barton, left the plane a much richer man than when he boarded, having collected \$332 from each traveling couple. Alas, his wealth lasted only through the immigration gates, and he was rapidly divested of his fortune. The cash collected was used to pay some of the expected expenses of our exchange.



We were welcomed at the airport in traditional Moldovan style being formally greeted with the gift of bread and salt gracefully presented by Alina Gilca in full traditional Moldovan dress. Mariana Turcan and Natalia Lipca, who had visited North Carolina with an Open World program two years ago, were joined by a number of

Moldovan colleagues and the host families. Ambassadors met their host families, and all were escorted to their accommodations, including Derek and Martha Brown who had arrived a day earlier.

We began to learn to properly pronounce Chisinau as 'Kishinau'. Luli gave us a ride to the city in her late model Toyota, accompanied by Mariana Turcan, our friend and head contact person for this visit. We learned that Mariana and Luli were taking the time to greet us at the airport, away from the final day of a program for 101 Moldovan Diaspora children having a reunion this week. They had to return as the Prime Minister of Moldova was coming to the camp to greet the children on the final day. Due to the shortage of one host family and also the fact that Jane had fractured her foot and was wearing an

orthopedic boot, Luli took us to the Leograd Hotel for our stay. We gratefully accepted this wonderful accommodation.

During the course of this first day, we were impressed with the youthful energy of the Moldovans supporting Friendship Force and we also learned something of the many considerations involved in Moldovan home hosting.

The day of our arrival was Moldova's Independence Day. Fireworks and music were downtown, but most of the ambassadors celebrated with their host families who took them to the Vatro Ethno Culture Park for an Independence Day celebration in the countryside near Chisinau. This is a recently opened venue and the Moldovans were quite excited about it. Music, exhibits, traditional foods, and numerous vendors were present. The large crowd listening to the various bands grew larger as the evening grew later despite the misty afternoon rain that never let up. The performers grabbed the attention of the audience and it was impressive to see the patriotic excitement of the Moldovan families, including many children, as they waved flags, sung, and danced. It was a good introduction to Moldovan society.

Thursday, August 28, 2014 by Barbara and Jim North

Our first day in Chisinau

After a late night celebrating Moldova's Independence Day with food and fireworks, Jim and I awoke to our first full day in Moldova. Our host, Zina Sochira, served us a BIG breakfast of chicken, cooked grains and placinte filled with cheese, cabbage and potatoes (more than we could possibly eat) and reminded us daily that breakfast was the most important meal of the day for Moldovans. Zina was so apologetic that morning for everything and we learned she had agreed to host us at the last minute after an early morning phone call the day of our arrival.

After breakfast we put on our walking shoes, left her fifth floor apartment, descended downstairs in a very small elevator, and proceeded to follow her at a brisk pace to walk to town – Zina has no car. We hurried through the neighboring streets, through back alleyways, and down narrow paths into town, through the center city park to the City Hall of Chisinau to begin our busy day. Zina then continued her walk to the Free International University of Chisinau



in town where she is head of library services.

One by one our exchange group slowly gathered outside the building. As our numbers grew so did the anxiety of the local police patrolling the area and they stopped to ask the reason for our gathering.

Our day's activities began with a tour of the city hall led by Natalia Lipca who had been a part of the Open World group FFCNC hosted two years ago. The Italian styled city hall houses the government offices of Chisinau. The current mayor, Dorin Chirtoaca, is a member of the Liberal Party. We gathered in the city council chambers where Ray presented to Natalia a letter of welcome and introduction from the mayor of Greensboro, Nancy Vaughn, to be given to the mayor of Chisinau who was unavailable that day. A large circular table filled the room and was flanked on the sides by pictures of Stefan the Great, Patron Saint of the city, and Saint Maria, Protector of the city. The flags of the EU, Chisinau and Moldova were also displayed.

After completion of the tour of city hall, we began a walking tour of the city with Danielle, who had been a 2011 Ben Franklin Fellow at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem. Moldova is a young country having declared independence on August 27, 1991 – only 23 years ago. Our walking tour began with Center City Park Square and the Chisinau Cathedral where the early government officials chose the location of Chisinau as the capital city. This beautiful church is Christian Orthodox, a religious faith practiced by the majority of the population. While touring the cathedral we were fortunate to witness a baby's baptism. In fact, we were to see numerous brides and hear honking horns several times as evidences of the many celebrations which were taking place on this day, a religious holiday to honor Saint Maria (Feast of the Assumption Day) in the Eastern Orthodox Church.



At Pushkin Park, we viewed the statue of Stefan Cel Mare which had been installed in 1928, altered during Soviet days, and relocated several times dependent upon the political climate of the times. It was here that we had a civic lesson and quiz on the symbolism of the Moldovan flag and heard about the Alley of the Writers. It is in this park that statues of over 50 writers have been placed – one each year since 1952.

Our city tour continued past the President's Offices, the Palace of the Republic, and the

Parliament Building. Parliament consists of 101 members including members of the Communist Party. Moldova is the only country in Europe where the Communist Party is democratically elected.

A hungry crowd met for a late lunch at La Placinte in downtown. Lunch was even more exciting when Nancy Peiffer discovered her hearing aid was missing and several of the group scrambled around on the floor searching in vain for the lost article.

After lunch we walked to the American Resource Center for a meeting with the Creative Development Association and the American Alumni Association members. We were greeted by Laura who works in the public affairs office of the US Embassy State Department which promotes cultural and educational cooperation and exchanges between the US and Moldova. We were introduced to Mariana's staff and reviewed the itinerary for the week.

After our meeting, Jim and I were met by Zina for a walk back to her apartment where we were treated to a delicious bowl of chicken soup followed by a walking tour of her neighborhood.

Friday, August 29, 2014 by Ray Kiszely

Day Two in Chisinau

I woke early to join Mihai Tanese for a dog walk in a park with Ragnar, his 8 month old Doberman. The park, Valea Trandifrilor, meaning valley of roses, was a short drive from the apartment of Stella and Mihai. The park has a small lake circled by a walking path with a sandy beach for swimmers, benches everywhere and a children's playground. This is a favorite site for local residents of Chisinau to relax or exercise.

We met bike riders, walkers, some with dogs. We saw some young people doing their yoga. I met a fisherman. He said he caught some fish, but did not have any with him. He must have thrown them back into the lake.

It was a beautiful morning following two previous days of cloudy weather with showers. The feel of autumn was in the air, trees were beginning to change colors, and it was a beautiful way to start the day. We met a friend of Mihai's, Dmitri Bratco, who works for the Ministry of Agriculture and also has a small vineyard and produces wine for sale locally.



Our host, Mihai, said that when the Soviet Union broke apart the maintenance of the park stopped. Even though there is a park department of the city, no repairs have been made to the facilities. This is sad, but evidently normal for city properties and infrastructure. Streets and sidewalks are in need of repair all over Chisinau.

Back at home Doris was already dressed and ready for the day. I got cleaned up and dressed for our tour/work day and enjoyed a delightful breakfast of cheeses, cold meats and fresh veggies. Last night we purchased salads from the Green Market for today's breakfast. A wonderful marinated thin slice of eggplant wrapping a goat cheese, mild and flavorful and traditional Moldovan. Bon Appetit!

Mihai drove us in his Skoda to the meeting location, passing through US Embassy security we arrived at our location. Mariana Turcan, Executive Director of Creative Development Association (CDA,) developed today's meeting. CDA is a US Government sponsored NGO comprised of a community of alumni of US government-sponsored exchange programs in Moldova, such as Fulbright, Open World, Ben Franklin Fellows, and so forth.

Friendship Force club members made presentations to approximately 30 (mostly) young people who responded to Mariana's invitation to learn about Friendship Force International. Barton opened the meeting with an overview of our purpose. I spoke about international peace building, homestays and volunteering. Barbara and Peter talked about how to organize a club and the reason for structure and by-laws. Ralph spoke about and showed the FFI website while some attendees used the organization's computers to follow along. FFI has a robust website that can be read in more than 60 languages including Romanian, the primary language of Moldova. Ralph suggested that as a new club they should be encouraged to begin their activities with an inbound exchange.

We took a refreshment break of coffee, tea, sweet rolls and fresh fruit. Doris then spoke about home hosting, day hosting, and dinner hosting, sharing some of her personal experiences as a host. Jim spoke about being an ambassador on an exchange to Japan a few years ago. One experience he shared was his decision to sleep on the floor in his host's home in order to experience the same sleeping circumstance as his host family.

Jane talked about the satisfaction of having visitors come to her home and getting to know their guests during one on one conversations especially while working together in the preparation of a meal. Nancy talked about breaking the ice of a language barrier such as she experienced during an exchange to Lima, Peru a few years ago. Although she spoke only a little Spanish and her host only spoke a little English, they managed to communicate and enjoyed each other's company during their stay.

Steve and Susan Tindall, from FF Pikes Peak in Colorado Springs, Colorado, talked about the importance of the role of the exchange director (ED.) Selecting the right ED is vital to the success of an exchange. He also spoke about his community and all Colorado has to offer to visitors including fishing, hiking, skiing, white water rafting and much

more. Susan provided several copies of an ED manual for the new club's use in getting started. She closed by saying "Plan it, Lead it, Call us. We will help!"

Martha talked about Communications. She explained that the objective of good communications is to get the word out both to members and the community. Some of the tools she mentioned that can be used are the FFI brochures, brochures for their local club, social media such as Facebook and Twitter, a club newsletter and website.

Peter spoke about what happens on an exchange and the importance of continuing the friendships that develop.

The meeting was closed with a video of the Friendship Force of the Pikes Peak Region, Colorado on an outbound exchange to Brandon, Manitoba, Canada, a relatively new FF club. The video showed some of the activities of an actual exchange. After the meeting we took a short walk to lunch at Della Nonna Trattoria, a small restaurant serving traditional dishes.



Following lunch we walked a short distance to "Muzeul National de Etnografie si Istorie Naturalia." Or in English: the Museum of Natural History and Ethnic Culture of Moldova. It is housed in a beautiful old (1911) building in an unusual style that gives it the appearance of Islamic influence such as is seen in North Africa or Southern Spain. Luckily not damaged during past wars, it survives to tell an important story of Moldova's historic past. It begins with a large display of archaeological findings from the prehistoric time including many fossils very well presented. Examples of many native animal species are beautifully preserved and presented. The last gallery gave us a look at the festive attire of the many different Moldovan cultures from over the past 100 years. Personally I could have spent at least half a day at the museum.

This evening we met Stella, Mihai's wife, who has been working in Istanbul for the past several days. Stella's flight was delayed and we arrived a little late (Moldovan time) for our traditional Moldovan dinner at La Chrisma which is a nicely decorated restaurant in the suburbs. Our meal was served family style with traditional dishes and plenty of wine. Following the meal we were divided into four groups and taught how to do the Hora, a simple, but fun Moldovan dance. Holding hands we circled in one direction, then

reversed. As the music got faster, so did the pace of the dance. We formed larger circles, then continued. Soon partners broke away from the circle and danced together in the center. The dance finally came to an end. We took a break, drank some water or wine and started over again. It was a great experience.



After we ate cake and fresh fruit, two of the waiters came in with giant heads on their shoulders and bearing wine and a special traditional sweet dessert to sample. It was a great evening for everyone!

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Saturday, August 30, 2014 by Evelyn Parks

We travel to Ungheni

Our group all met at a central location in Chisinau and boarded a bus to take us to Ungheni. Our host families had most generously prepared take-away lunches for us.

Around 2:00 p.m. we arrived at our hotel, the Vila Verde-Ungheni, a modern and spacious three star hotel.

After an hour or so, settling in and resting up in the hotel, we visited the mayor of Ungheni, Mr. Alexandru Ambrose. He gave a very good presentation about his hopes and dreams for Ungheni. He showed a presentation about his goals and thoughts concerning city government and then a short video about current Ungheni outreach programs and businesses.



After the Mayor's presentation to us, Martha Brown read and presented a proclamation from Allen Joines, the mayor of Winston-Salem, sister-city of Ungheni, and gave him three gifts, including a shell she had personally collected, and some Moravian cookies.

After the presentations, we were offered a buffet of special foods, including wine made by the mayor himself.

After the visit with the mayor, we drove to the Eiffel Bridge which carries train traffic over the Prut River which forms the border between Moldova and Romania. We were granted permission to walk on it, getting within inches of actually entering Romania.

After our visit to the bridge, we drove to the local train station and watched the workmen change wheels on the Bucharest train from European (Romanian) wide gauge tracks to Russian (Moldovan) narrow gauge tracks through a process of jacking up each car and rolling new wheels underneath.

We then returned to our hotel and gathered together to walk to the town square where visiting delegations from many of Ungheni's sister cities, among them Carmel, Israel and Reghin, Romania, presented their greetings to Ungheni.

After the presentations by visiting delegations from Romania, Israel and ours from the United States, we were offered a lovely and elegant reception with champagne, cognac, many special foods, and wine. Over 200 people, including the mayor and his assistant, participated.



Sunday, August 31, 2014 by Steve and Susan Tindell

Ungheni and our return to Chisinau

At first I wasn't sure whether I was still dreaming or awake. The beautiful sound of choir music filled the air. I soon realized that there was a church across the street from the Vila Verde Hotel in Ungheni where we spent the night. It was Sunday morning and Language Day, part of a national holiday in Moldova.

After breakfast at the hotel everyone convened at a nearby statue of Mihai Eminescu, regarded as the most famous and influential Romanian poet. He lived from 1850 to 1889 and is highly regarded by Moldovans. We watched a group of young people sing and make speeches. The mayor, Alexandru Ambros, and a former Prime Minister also spoke.



Afterward we walked a short distance to the source of the beautiful music that had been my wake up call. We stood outside the Alexander Nevsky church, which was filled with worshipers and listened to the amazing choir singing within. The church namesake was a Saint of the Russian Orthodox Church and lived from 1220 to 1263.

We took another brief stroll to City Hall. When we arrived we were met again by the mayor and approximately twenty people interested in starting a Friendship Force Club in Ungheni. After opening remarks by the mayor our group presented a brief overview of key points about Friendship Force and starting a club. Afterward, there was much discussion among the attendees about Friendship Force. The mayor is a strong advocate for starting an Ungheni Friendship Force club and this was apparent by the enthusiasm he showed each time we met with him.

We were sad to leave Ungheni as we boarded our van for the trip back to Chisinau because everyone we met had welcomed us so warmly and enthusiastically. After a brief ride we stopped for lunch at Erni's Pizza. Erni's is a very unassuming place at first glance; however, once you enter you are greeted by the owner and his wife and treated to a delicious lunch as though you were longtime friends. Erni's is a must stop for anyone visiting the area.

Enroute to Chisinau we stopped at an awesome viewpoint overlooking the city of Capriana and a dense forest of oak and nut trees, then we drove to a monastery in the city. We strolled through the serene grounds and toured the beautiful monastery, built in the 1400's before continuing our trip back to Chisinau.

That evening we took our hosts, Marian, Valentina and Laura out for our Host Appreciation dinner. They chose a wonderful new restaurant recommended by their friends for its steaks. The steaks were delicious and some of the best I've eaten. After a great dinner we returned to our host's beautiful home for much Moldovan wine, Jack Daniel's and friendship until the wee hours of the morning. We really enjoyed Moldova,

Moldovan hospitality and especially our newfound friends - Marian, Valentina and Laura who seem more like family than simply friends. We really hope that they come to Colorado so we can attempt to repay them for their generous hospitality. We are also deeply indebted to the Central North Carolina Friendship Force club for letting us share such a once in a lifetime experience.

Monday, September 1, 2014 by Peter and Nancy Peiffer

The first day of school in Moldova

Our host family in Chisinau was wonderful, most gracious and kind. This family of four, Dumitru and Diana Saghan and their two sons, Christian (10) and Sebastian (1 1/2), were experiencing a crisis while we were there. Sebastian had to be hospitalized with pneumonia and kidney problems so Diana stayed with him in the hospital. He was only home for two nights and was back in the hospital before we arose on Monday morning. Dumitru and Diana are both trained surgeons, but are both working in other fields now because they “cannot support a family” on a doctor’s salary.

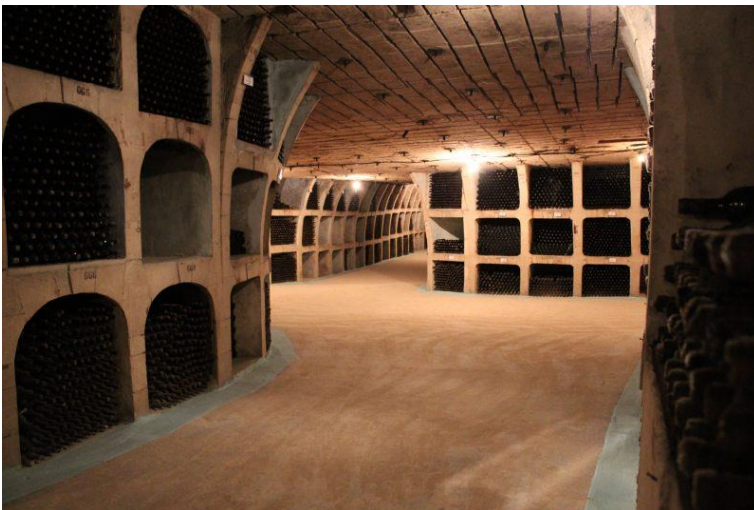


September 1 is the first day of school in Moldova and they truly make it a big and important day. Christian had a new suit and shoes for the event. He needed to be at school at 8 a.m. So he had to get himself up early because his mom and dad were at the hospital with a sick Sebastian. In addition to getting himself ready, Christian cooked us breakfast. Parents and/or grandparents accompany most students to school on this day. We were honored to walk him to school that day. The walk took approximately ten minutes. We saw

other children dressed in navy and white clothes and many carried flowers to give to their teachers. Many of the girls had fresh flowers in their hair. We went with Christian to his classroom where he was assigned the job of finding the other boys who were not there and giving them their nametags. The whole school met outside for a ceremony. Several children and the principal gave speeches and one girl did a fairly long solo...all in Romanian. The Orthodox priest gave a ten minute blessing, then walked among the crowd with a sponge on a stick, dipping it in a bucket of holy water and spraying the crowd. We are now officially blessed. The newest students (kindergarten or 1st grade) filed in carrying red, yellow and blue balloons, which were released at the end of the ceremonies. All very impressive and the thousand or so parents (and foreign visitors) were very proud of their children. Christian became concerned that we would not be able to find our way back home and would not let us leave until he called his dad on his cell phone to be assured that we would be OK.

We walked home and found the nanny there making chicken soup for our lunch so we took advantage of that time to explore their neighborhood which had many shops, restaurants and businesses as well as residences. Our home was a condominium on the 10th floor of a large residential building with shops on the ground level. We had two security codes to remember before entering doors. We had a very nice upstairs bedroom-bath combination with a washing machine. There was a sitting room outside our room with access to the roof where they dried clothes and caught up with the next-door neighbor across the fence as we would at ground level at home.

After our lunch, Dumitru returned from the hospital to take us to meet the bus for our trip to the winery. To our surprise Christian, who was home from school by this time, was joining us and had been instructed on how much wine he could sample.



Mileștii Mici is a winery located a few kilometers outside of Chisinau that houses the largest collection of natural wines in the world. It is inside an old limestone mine that stretches 120 miles at a depth of 2500 feet. This makes the conditions perfect for making and storing wines. Mileștii Mici is state owned and makes and sells a wide variety of wines that are produced from grapes

grown all over Moldova. Their collection of over 1.5 million bottles of wine is approximately 70% red wines, 20% white and 10% sparkling and rose.

When we arrived we took a few pictures and visited their wine room/store briefly, then we got in the van and proceeded underground with our English-speaking guide, Catherina. In the tunnels it was very dark, quiet and cool. We saw many rows of bottles and a number of oak casks. It was a picturesque and impressive scene. There was an underground waterfall and we saw the equipment with which they actually dug the limestone out of the mine, thereby creating the cave. Viewing different kinds and grades of wines was fun... all the way up to the most expensive wines stored there. They even have an area where they store wines brought to them by private wine collectors from Russia and China.

We proceeded to the wine tasting area where we sampled several different wines and were serenaded by a small group of musicians. After the wine tasting we found our way back to the store and purchased a number of bottles of wine. Very few of these bottles lasted long enough to make it out of Moldova... Most were given to hosts or consumed.

Oleg Sirbu and Oleg Tulea, both members of Parliament and Open World delegates who visited FFCNC in 2012, joined us this afternoon. Our tour and wine tasting were their gift to FFCNC to show their thanks for the hospitality shown to them when they visited the Triad.

We had a little extra time so Marianna decided it would be good to introduce us to fine Moldovan chocolates. We went to the BuCuria Chocolate factory where they have an outlet store. We did get to sample a bit and several in the group bought some of the very fine chocolates they offered. Some was eaten and some given as gifts.

Next, it was time for our dinner. This was the “USA and culture night.” We arrived at The Gallo Pub for the occasion. Hosts families and delegates were all present so it was quite a large gathering. We had a brief cocktail/social gathering then sat down to dinner. We all ordered from the extensive menu, so the evening tended to get a little long. It was quite a while before the meal was served and eaten which left little time for singing and cultural activities. The NC group wore our NC tee shirts and did a rousing version of “Nothing Could be Finer than to be in Carolina” followed by the Moldovan group singing it in Romanian - despite the fact they were not familiar with the tune. The evening ended with Steve Tindell leading the whole group in a line dance and rousing rendition of “Cotton Eye Joe” which the Parks responded to well from their early days growing up in Texas.



Overall, it was a very satisfying day in Moldova.

Tuesday, September 2, 2014 by Doris Kiszely

Our last day in Chisinau

This morning we were hosted by Oleg Tulea and one of his fellow Parliament members, Deputy Chairman Sîrbu Serghei, as we toured the Moldovan Parliament building. It recently has been refurbished. The building itself is rather imposing. We went through security and then into the foyer which was all marble with a beautiful sparkling crystal chandelier. In the center of the room are the flag of Moldova and photos of heads of State. We were shown to the pressroom and then the Parliament Chamber which is very finely appointed with warm colored wood desks and high-backed comfortable chairs. We took many photos with the two members of Parliament.



We then got on our tour bus and drove about 60 kilometers northeast to the town of Orheiul Vechi, a historical site that is in the hills north of Chisinau. In the past, monks lived in caves and built a church underground in this area. We could see the caves from the road, but we were unable to visit them because of a time constraint. We experienced a flat tire along the way, which put us behind schedule. We used the "down time" while our driver changed the tire to have a feedback and evaluation session in the shade of the trees on the side of the road. An hour later, we were on our way again.



We had a terrific lunch at a little village restaurant. The countryside is beautiful with rolling hills filled with different crops. The villages we passed through contained individual houses, many made from stone. Most of the houses have fairly high fences with gates. Mariana said that the gate was the

welcoming place of the home, not a place to block entry, but a place to be welcomed through.

Barton brought out a good point about the root of the two words - hospitality and hostility. Both are formed from the same root, but they have opposite meanings.

We then returned to the city where we visited a park that had many craft and tchotchkes (little trinkets) for sale. Some men were playing chess and another game that looked similar to backgammon. We stopped for a coffee and then we headed to Pizza Mania for our farewell dinner. Mariana made brief and sincere remarks then each of her team added their thoughts. They presented each of us with a tee shirt commemorating our stay here in Moldova. We returned to the homes of our hosts and repacked our bags for a 10:10 am flight to Istanbul, Turkey in the morning.

Epilogue by Ray Kiszely

Just two months after we left Moldova, November 7, 2014, a few of my FFCNC colleagues joined me in a meeting with his Excellency Igor Munteanu, the Moldovan Ambassador to the United States. Brian Anderson of the “Moldovan House Inc.”, a local non-profit with interest in building business relationships with the United States invited us.

The Ambassador is a charming person whose hometown happens to be Ungheni. It is truly a small world. At the reception following our meeting, we were treated to some excellent Moldovan wines and a nice selection of cold hors d'oeuvres.

North Carolina Secretary of State, Elaine Marshall, addressed the gathering of small business leaders with an interest in developing ties with Moldova. She has traveled to Moldova many times and in part is responsible for the strong 'sister-state' relations between North Carolina and Moldova.

We hope to develop a collaborative relationship between Moldova House and FFCNC through future programs with Open World and this beautiful small country.

We planted a lot of Friendship Force seeds during the week we were hosted in Chisinau and Ungheni. Our task now is to stay connected and nurture the relationships developed so that our friends in Moldova will soon be welcoming other Friendship Force ambassadors from around the world, and eventually they will travel to North Carolina and Colorado to return our visit. I love Moldova!