



May 2025

# friendship force

CENTRAL  
NORTH CAROLINA

## Open World from Moldova

Once again FFCNC has experienced a successful and rewarding Open World program.

Our five delegates and their facilitator arrived in Washington, DC Thursday morning, May 8 after an overnight flight. They hit the ground running as they had a full day of meetings at the US Capitol and a quick sightseeing tour. On Friday they flew to the PTI airport and arrived in the afternoon. After baggage was collected, an orientation meeting was held in a nearby conference room during which time Ray Kiszely distributed information to the delegates and hosts which outlined the week's schedule and plans.



L to R: Pavel Ianet, Valentina Casian, Lidia Sanduleac, their guide, Stela Onutu, Ion Titu, and Dumitru Ivanov after their tour of the US Capitol.



A welcome lunch was held Saturday at C&H Cafeteria in Kernersville. Free time that day included an optional visit to the Guilford Animal Resource Center and time for shopping. The animal shelter was a last-minute addition to the schedule due to the interest of one delegate whose city is plagued with stray animals. The Animal Services Director and Clerk of Board presented an overview of the teamwork and cooperation necessary to work on animal control issues and population. They emphasized that cooperation is important from many community agencies such as Family Services, the Public Health Department, Mental Health, Police and Sheriff Departments and Emergency Services. The delegates were given a tour of the new state-of-the-art animal care facility which is rated as one of the top five animal shelters in the nation.

On Sunday there was an optional visit to the Greensboro Science Center and one delegate visited Grandfather Mountain. Plus, more time for shopping.



Dinner at the Poplin home: Standing in the back are Roger and Nan Poplin. Seated are (L to R) Lidia Sanduleac, Carolyn Dilda, Dumitru Ivanov, Don Woodward, Mary Davis, Stela Onutu, and Ion Titu.

The theme of this Open World program was “Rule of Law, Local Legislators.” On Monday the delegates, facilitator, and translator (who arrived that morning) were divided into two smaller groups. One group attended the professional program in Greensboro while the other group attended in Winston Salem. This allowed the delegate who is a Councilor for the city of Ungheni, a sister city of Winston Salem, to meet with Mayor Allen Joines while the delegate who represents a municipality (something like our counties) which has a sister city of Greensboro met with Mayor Pro Tempore, Marikay Abuzuaiter. Topics in both cities touched on issues such as city planning, infrastructure, housing and urban development, human rights, law and order, and cultural activities.

Tuesday’s professional program was conducted entirely in Greensboro. Wednesday the delegates visited the International Civil Rights Museum before driving to Chapel Hill and the UNC School of Government for an afternoon professional meeting. Their Raleigh hosts met them there and drove them to their new host



families in Raleigh. Thursday's and Friday's professional meetings were focused on government at the state level.

While still in the Triad the evenings were just as busy as the workdays with group dinners (including one Moldovan meal prepared entirely by our guests!), a baseball game, outdoor concert, and (did I mention this earlier?) more shopping.



Lidia Sanduleac & Ion Titu preparing a Moldovan meal for the Greensboro hosts.



Pavel Ianet on the swinging bridge at Grandfather Mountain.



Tamara Michael and Valentina Casian at a concert benefiting cancer patients.

The group at the Greensboro Science Center





## FF Sacramento Inbound

Our eleven guests from FF Sacramento will arrive on Tuesday, June 3 after spending one week with the Raleigh FF club. Many thanks go out to our home hosts – our Winston Salem members Richard and Valerie Briggs, Karla Shanahan, Don Woodward, Kathleen McGinley, Donna Torreyson and Greensboro and Guilford County members Carolyn Dilda, Rod and Nancy Edens, Charles and Marilyn John, Michael and Eleanor Stoller and Roger and Nan Poplin. And a special thank you to Don Woodward who is hosting for the third time this year!

Their activities will include a visit to Old Salem, a day in Lexington visiting the Richard Childress Racing Museum and Vineyards, Guilford College and a presentation on the role of Quakers in the Underground Railroad, the International Civil Rights Museum, and finally, wrapping up with a day visit to Mt. Airy.

An additional thank you goes to Sandra Gramley who, as our Social Chairperson, continues to plan our club gatherings. There will be a **Welcome picnic on Wednesday, June 4, at 5:30** at Harmon Park in Kernersville. A Punchbowl invitation was emailed on May 23. If you have not done so already, please RSVP by June 1. If you plan to attend, sub sandwiches will be provided. Members are asked to bring drinks, sides, and/or desserts to share. If you have any questions, contact Sandra Gramley at 336-407-5738.

A **farewell dinner** of Moravian chicken pie will also be open to all members. It will be held **Sunday, June 8, at 6 PM** at the Main Street United Methodist Church in Kernersville. A Punchbowl invitation was emailed on May 26. FFCNC members are asked to bring sides &/or drinks.

## FF Denver Outbound

Our group of fifteen ambassadors traveling to Denver in August is filled to capacity! Those traveling on August 4<sup>th</sup> are the Edens, Kiszelys, Johns, Cauthens, Poplins, Karla Shanahan, Marta Rhodes, Judy Greene, Danny Crump, and Lundee Amos. We believe this is the largest group of ambassadors FFCNC has ever sent on an outbound journey!



## FF Costa Rica Outbound

Flight reservations have been made for the FFCNC ambassadors traveling to San Jose. A week of extended travel has been planned for Barbara North, Tomoko Thornburg, and Martha and Derek Brown. After the homestay, this smaller group will visit the Arenal Volcano National Park which is in a rain forest. Traveling to the next stop will include boating across Lake Arenal and driving over the Continental Divide to arrive in the cloud forest of Monteverde (the “green mountain.”) Finally, the group will visit the Manuel Antonio tropical beaches on the Pacific coast.

## 2026 Journeys

Dates for the following outbound and inbound journeys have not yet been determined but keep these months in mind as you make 2026 plans.

May	Outbound to FF Florida Suncoast club (on the Gulf coast in the Clearwater, Florida area)
August	Outbound to FF Kumamoto, Japan
October	Inbound from FF Pikes Peak (Colorado)

## Social Activities

The visit in late April to the Intergenerational Center for Arts and Wellness in Winston-Salem was well attended as you can see by the photo below. The group enjoyed their tour of the facility and learning more about the twenty-one organizations that have come together under one roof to assist older adults.



L to R: Marta Rhodes, Jude Greene, Margaret Griffin, Barbara North, Rod Edens, Nancy Edens, Sandra Gramley, Andrea Ostberg, Kenneth Ostberg, Ray Kiszely, and Doris Kiszely.

Mark your calendars for **June 24<sup>th</sup>** when the Edens will host a two-fold event at Friends Homes West in Greensboro. While Nancy demonstrates how to bake artisan bread and cinnamon rolls, Rod will be engaging others in (plastic) ax throwing, billiards, and ping pong. Lunch will be on your own if you would like to dine there.

## A Fine Man

We just completed our 10<sup>th</sup> Open World program. FFCNC hosted its first Open World in 2007. It was a group of eight businessmen from different Russian cities who came with the purpose of understanding how business and government can work together. Peter Peiffer, Ralph Cauthen, and I developed the program. The youngest delegate of this group was a 30-year-old man from Moscow who was hosted by the Peiffers – Nikita Bekasov. Upon his return to Russia, he kept in frequent contact with the Peiffers, the Cauthens, and me, Martha Brown.

In 2008 I took my family to Russia. While in Moscow Nikita spent time with us. He took us to see a new museum about World War II (known in Russian as the Great Patriotic War). He drove us in his Honda imported from Japan with the steering wheel on the right side of the car! But mostly I remember the conversations we had with him.

In the next few years, twice he returned to North Carolina with his wife, Anya. Again, spending time with the Peiffers and the Browns. I remember his wife making us a cucumber soup and explaining how she could select the right cucumbers to use. In between these visits, emails passed back and forth. Usually with photos of vacations on the Black Sea.

In 2015 FFCNC was matched to visit the FF club of Moscow! Nikita had previously considered joining this Friendship Force club, but the dues were too much for his budget. I was happy to plan our club's journey to Moscow and in June our group of 25 ambassadors, 13 of us from FFCNC, landed in Moscow. After an hour's drive from the airport, we made it to the location near Red Square where our host families met us. By this time, Nikita was married and his small apartment (the living room was also the only bedroom) was too small to host anyone, but he was waiting for the arrival of our group. During our week in Moscow, Nikita was frequently with us. So much so that most of my group thought he was a member of the Moscow club. One day he alone led our excursion to St. Sergius Trinity Lavra. Little did we know when we said goodbye that he and his wife would have a baby girl in January.

Not long after Russia attacked Ukraine in February 2022, emails to Nikita were no longer returned. After more than a year, I emailed Anya and learned that Nikita "went to war voluntarily" and in November of 2023 he had gone "missing." Only recently did Anya learn Nikita's fate. He was not a POW; he died fighting. DNA testing identified his body which was returned to Moscow. He was buried with military honors.

I shared this news with those of us who knew Nikita well and also with Ray who has been involved with every one of our Open World programs except the first one. Ray replied with the following:

*Nikita, like many young men in Ukraine and Russia, was "called to duty" and he served willingly even if he doubted the purpose of the battle he was ordered to fight. His family will suffer for his loss and will likely feel anger and frustration just as Mothers and Fathers and Wives and Husbands have for hundreds of years.*

*Let's not think of Nikita as "the enemy" or that we cannot honor him. He fulfilled his duty as a man for his Country and died doing it. We ought to feel sad about the state of relations between warring nations and do all we can to encourage peaceful discussion about disagreements when we can and where we can.*

*We knew Nikita to be a fine man, and we should remember him, for all the good he did for us, voluntarily.*





Above: Martha Brown, Karlyn Shankland, Nikita Bekasov.

Left: Nikita and Ralph Cauthen.

Bottom Left: Anya Bekasova, Martha Brown, Nikita, Ralph Cauthen, and Jane Cauthen.

Bottom Right: Nikita tells the Moscow Ambassadors about the history and layout of Kolomenskoe Park, the location of the reconstructed wooden palace built by Peter the Great's father.

