



October 2025

# friendship force

CENTRAL  
NORTH CAROLINA

## Animal Park at the Conservators Center

Fifteen FFCNC members met on a beautiful fall day to learn more about this organization and meet many of their 60+ animal friends representing 24 species. Many of the animals belong to the cat family, but other animals living there include a skunk, opossum, lizard, snake, tortoise, sloth, dingo, wolf, and an owl. Some were held as pets and given up; others were held at zoos and moved there as they aged.

As a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization, the Conservators Center operates without government funding and relies on sources like tours, memberships, donations, grants, and events. The center's finances are supported through its fundraising activities and a business model that blends education, animal care, and advocacy for species. Consequently, compared to a zoo, such as the NC zoo, the living accommodations for the animals are small and lack the appearance of their natural habitat. The larger animals live in cages or pens, often encircled by two rows of fencing. This, of course, allows a zookeeper to enter the outer fence, close it, then open the gate to the smaller enclosure ensuring that, in the event an animal wants to get out of his pen, he is still confined.



As always, our members were inquisitive visitors. One highlight of the visit for Tamara Michael was meeting a dedicated volunteer who visits her adopted animals daily and offers them treats (with tongs, large and small depending on the animal.) Ralph Cauthen found it interesting that the lion who, after greeting visitors, went to drink water and stayed there as long as anyone was watching. He'd fulfilled his obligation to greet the visitors and was ready to return to some privacy!



Speaking of the lion, the guide explained at the beginning of the tour that, when the group visited the lion, he would roar and then the group would hear another lion in another part of the park, roar back in return. Martha Brown had to leave early, but just as she made it back to the parking lot, indeed, the lions roared quite loudly back and forth. She wondered what the rural neighbors living nearby in Alamance County think about hearing lions roaring all the time!

## Adding to the History of a Friendship

Five months ago, FFCNC organized an Open World program on the “Rule of Law, Local Legislators” and our members hosted five delegates and their facilitator from Moldova. Over the years FFCNC has had a special affinity for Moldova and its people. In 2012 we hosted our first Open World delegation from Moldova. In 2014 FFCNC traveled to Moldova and assisted them in creating a Friendship Force club in the capital city of Chişinău. In 2022 FFCNC hosted a group of Moldovan teenagers who had been selected to study in the US during one of the previous two school years, but due to the pandemic, were unable to do that.



When we hosted the Moldovan delegation in May, Tamara Michael hosted Valentina Casian. Earlier this month Tamara was able to travel to Moldova to visit Valentina. Below is Tamara’s travelogue about this trip.

*Following the Open World – Congressional Office International Leadership visit with Moldovan government representatives to North Carolina in May 2025, I started planning a trip to Moldova for their Wine Festival in October and a visit with Valentina Casian, Mayor of Straseni. As three friends and I arrived at City Hall in Straseni, we stepped into a room filled with her team to receive a “Bridge to Friendship” diploma after a ceremonial welcome and taking a pinch of bread, a Moldovan tradition of friendship. What a wonderful reunion seeing Valentina again. Valentina stayed with me while in Winston Salem.*



*Next on the agenda was a quick visit to the Straseni Historical and Ethnological Museum before heading to winery Chateau Cojuşna for a tour and lunch. We were on a tight schedule due to Valentina’s prior invitation to the German Embassy in Chişinău later in the day. Hugs and goodbyes before leaving.*



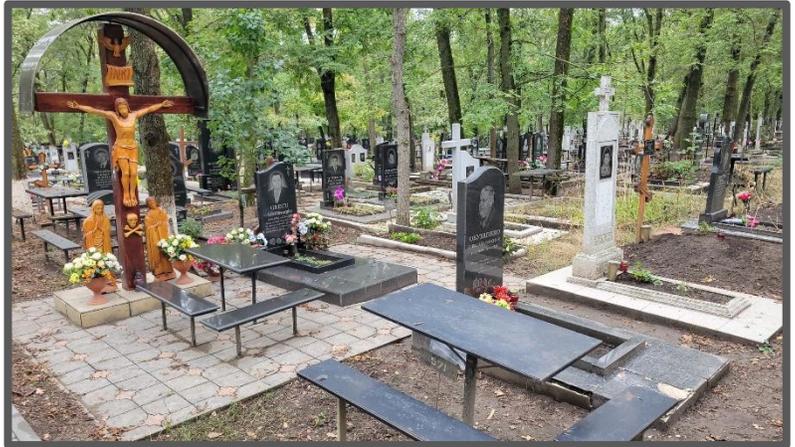
*The prior day Pavel Ianeţ, a Moldovan representative in Open World hosted by Martha Brown, picked us up at the Orhei hotel Chateau Vartely for touring the archaeological site at Orhei Vechi also known for its Cave Monastery dug out by Orthodox monks in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Pavel even guided us into meditation cells. Sitting on a stone threshold, a monk read until a customer displayed interest in purchasing candles or souvenirs.*



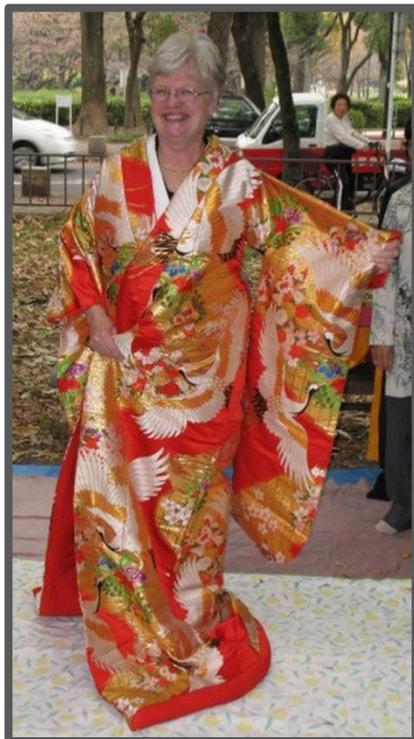
Also on the tour was Curchi Monastery with several churches located on its property such as St Nicholas, considered the winter church, and Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Cathedral, the larger and more difficult to heat. Lunch at the Eco-Resort in Butuceni highlighted sampling a table full of Moldovan food plus wine.

The day wasn't over quite yet. Next stop was Epoca de Piatră, a restaurant in a cave for dessert and more wine. By this time our stomachs barely allowed another spoon of food, but we managed...crepes with vanilla cream. Pavel had just come off election campaigning, and we appreciated his time spent with us.

Seeing cemeteries is one of my favorite things to do while traveling. Pavel honored the request to stop by one. Every country honors their deceased in interesting ways, and this cemetery was no exception. Symbolically, at Easter, families come to clean up their gravesites and spend the day with their ancestors. We even met a grave digger who was quite proud to see visitors. With my phone forgotten back at the hotel, friends snapped some photos.



We valued the time both Valentina and Pavel extended to show us their part of Moldova, taking time out of their busy schedules. The wine festival was fun as well.



## Carol Andresen

For those FFCNC members who do not know Carol Andresen, she is a special FFCNC member. In 2006 FF of Winston-Salem and Citizens for International Understanding in Greensboro merged to form Friendship Force of Central North Carolina. Carol served as FFCNC's first president. She is currently living in the skilled nursing facility of Twin Lakes in Burlington. Carol is unable to accept phone calls, but cards may be mailed to her care of Fred Andresen, 3003 Black Elk Court, Burlington, NC 27215.

## Save the Date!

Our annual meeting to elect officers for 2026 is tentatively planned for brunch on Saturday, December 13 at 11:00. Details to follow soon.

## Membership for All: A Global Initiative

One month ago, Jeremy Snook, the CEO and President of Friendship Force International, shared an important update with all FFI clubs around the globe. What follows is a summary of the key points shared with all the FFI club presidents.

- *The FFI board approved the single most significant change to our membership model since the introduction of clubs in 1983.*
- *What this decision means and the important role the US FF Field Representatives will play in helping FFI to ensure a smooth and successful rollout.*
- *Why change now?*
  - *For years FFI's membership dues model has lagged far behind evolving best practices in international associations. The membership fee has only ever been set in US dollars, with no adjustment for inflation or cost-of-living differences across regions.*
  - *After careful study, multiple iterations, and extensive discussion, we are ready to move forward with a three-year, three-phase rollout.*
- *Summary overview – Phase 1, 2026*
  - *US FFI membership dues will increase to \$8.33/month or \$100/year.*
  - *US members may pay annually or monthly via credit card beginning January 1, 2026.*
  - *Membership dues will decrease in Mexico, Brazil, the Caribbean, Kenya, Ghana, Indonesia, India, Korea, Mongolia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Peru, South Africa, and New Caledonia.*
  - *Membership for children under 18 years of age will be free.*
  - *Membership dues for all other countries not mentioned above will remain at \$30 USD for 2026.*
- *Summary overview – Phase 2, 2027*
  - *Membership dues for all remaining clubs may increase according to research and analysis. Final amounts are to be announced in April 2026.*
  - *Dues will be set in local currencies.*
- *Summary overview – Phase 3, 2028*
  - *Adjustments to strengthen global equity, including options for host-only members and clubs.*
  - *Broader review of journey fees and FFI's expanded global impact.*
- *"Membership for All" was intentionally chosen...*
  - *to reflect one of the key drivers of this initiative – increasing hosting capacity globally by setting membership dues in local currencies and reflective of local economies.*
  - *A second benefit of this adjustment relates to the long-term sustainability of FFI.*
- *Communication plan*
  - *In early November additional information will be made available directly to all members.*
- *Final thoughts – In fund raising, we often say, "people give to people." The same is true here: members will embrace this change when they hear the story and understand the vision.*

Also of note, club presidents received a two-page handout of the "Financial Overview 2025." The bottom lines noted that FFI's total income for 2024 was \$917,138 and total expenses were \$930,040.

Look for more information on this topic in the near future.