

# 2013 Annual Report for FF-NM

## **2013 ANNUAL REPORT For The Friendship Force of New Mexico**

**Submitted by John Heard**

The year 2013 was full of fun and rewarding activities for our club. We had two exchanges, one outbound to Chiapas, Mexico, in February, and one inbound from Costa Rica in September. Monthly luncheons were held throughout the year, all with interesting speakers, identified by our outstanding Speaker Chairperson, Carolyn Sedberry. There were many other activities as well, including a well-attended new member orientation, a Chinese New Year celebration and a tour of the Wheels Museum in Albuquerque. We also responded to a prior year request from a member in Belarus for nuclear dirt from the Trinity site in Southern New Mexico to be placed in a Nuclear Pantheon in Belarus.

The year began under direction of the new FFNM Board comprised of the following:

Co-Presidents: John and Anne Heard

Vice-President: Berta Wagstaff

Treasurer: Nelle Conway

Secretary: Judith Mead

Co-Past Presidents and Social Chairpersons: David and Martha Meister

Historian: Peggy Birmingham

Membership Chair: Evelyn Thole

Ruth O'Keefe: Director SW Regional Conference

At mid-year we were joined by Cheryl Lehmberg as Webmaster

The first major event was the outbound exchange in February to the Mundo Maya Club in Chiapas, Mexico, under the direction of Co-EDs, John and Anne Heard. It was a one week exchange, but demanding in that it included a mid-visit three-day excursion to the Mayan ruins at Palenque and the Colonial city of San Cristobal. The exchange included six participants from New Mexico and 12 from other clubs around the country. This made for complicated selection, communications, arrangements and planning, but it was a successful visit and our Mexican hosts provided truly wonderful hospitality. Many lessons were learned, which were documented and are available in FFNM files. For the future, it would be preferable to have more participants from our own club. We also need to pay more attention to careful selection in the case of members joining us from clubs outside of New Mexico.

The second exchange, from Alajuela, Costa Rica, took place in September under the direction of ED Ruth O'Keefe and included 16 fun and lively Costa Ricans. We had a full program for them including the major sites of Albuquerque and Santa Fe plus an all-day field trip to Chamayó. They also attended our September monthly luncheon. Member and host Alicia Fletcher provided highly professional translation services throughout the visit. We had wonderful welcome and farewell celebrations hosted by Ruth O'Keefe and Ginger Grossetete respectively. In the Farewell Dinner, Ginger gave the "Ticos" a fabulous square dancing lesson. There were many speeches and everyone had a great time.

At mid-year Cheryl Lehmborg, a new member, took over as web-master and did an extraordinary job in updating the FF New Mexico website, which was sadly out of date. It is now a credible vehicle for communication and for introducing the club to potential new members. Thanks to first class work by member Sue Bowersock, we had excellent newsletters published quarterly throughout the year.

Regarding plans for the coming year, the big event will be the Friendship Force Conference of clubs from the Southwest Region to be held March 21-23 of 2014 in Albuquerque, which we will host. Planning and communications for this event proceeded throughout the year led by Ruth O'Keefe, our Conference Director. We also agreed with Friendship Force International to host one outgoing and two incoming exchanges. The incomings include the Sarasota, Florida, club in mid-April and the Blue Mountains club from Australia in late May. The outgoing will be a return visit to Sarasota in November. March through May of next year will be an extremely busy time. We attempted to spread these events out, but it was not possible due to earlier commitments and guidance from FFI.

For 2015, our outbound request, submitted in October, included Israel, New Zealand and Canada in that order. This was based on a member survey in the October luncheon. We also have an inbound scheduled for March of 2015 with the Hay River Club from the Northwest Territories of Canada.

In September we elected the new Board for 2014 comprised of the following members:

President: Judith Mead

Vice-President: Berta Wagstaff

Co-Treasurers: David and Martha Meister

Secretary: Cheryl Lehmborg (Cheryl is also our continuing webmaster)

Past Co-Presidents: John and Anne Heard

Historian: Peggy Birmingham

Membership Chair: Evelyn Thole

Director SW Regional Conference: Ruth O'Keefe

In November John and Anne Heard attended the Friendship Force World Conference in New Orleans. It was an impressive gathering with 700 representatives from all over the world. It also provided a

series of relevant and interesting workshops and breakout sessions related to FF activities of all types and was a great learning experience for John and Anne. It also gave us the chance to meet the new President and CEO of Friendship Force International, Joy DiBenedetto. We used the opportunity to promote our SW Conference in 2014 and negotiate her attendance. A report on the conference is in FFNM files.

We wrapped up the year with a gala Christmas seated luncheon in December complete with cash bar, a fun raffle and a fascinating presentation from one of the survivors of the Costa Concordia cruise ship disaster.

-