

Friends of Korea

Dedicated to fostering cultural awareness and
friendship between Americans and Koreans

Annual Report – 2020

2020 will forever be etched in our memories as the year of the global pandemic – a year when life came to a sudden stop and everyone, everywhere was forced to find new ways of getting through the day. While it was a year marked by great sadness and fear for many around the world, it was also ironically a year of innovation and new beginnings. Friends of Korea pivoted to new ways of reaching out and found that there were ample new opportunities to support our mission of promoting friendship and understanding between Americans and Koreans. In light of the growing anti-Asian sentiment seen across the United States, the importance of our mission was reinforced.

COVID-19 Survival Box

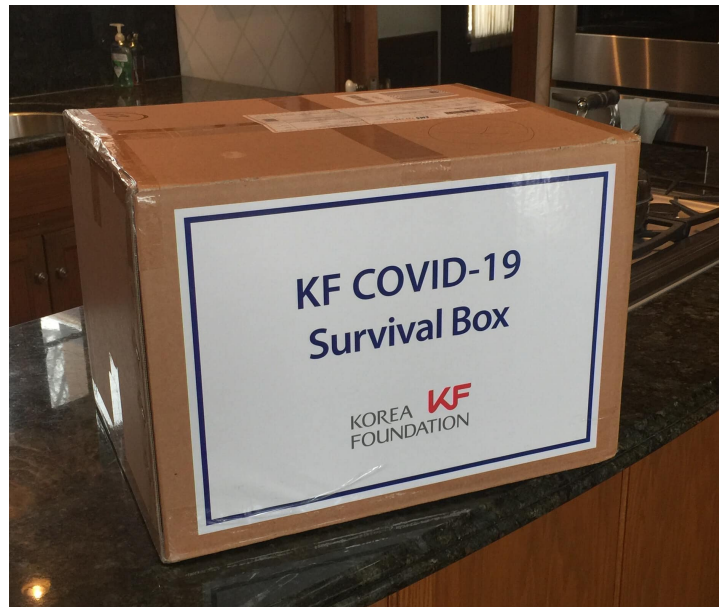
Over a period of several weeks in October and November, more than 550 returned Peace Corps Korea volunteers each received a COVID-19 Survival Box.

Accompanying these gifts was a letter from Guen Lee, President of The Korea Foundation, which started as follows:

Greetings from Seoul!

The Korea Foundation regrets that, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we are unable to meet you in South Korea this year.

Instead, with the spirit of greetings and goodwill, we have prepared a KF COVID-19 Survival Box for you, including filtered face masks and various gifts that we hope will remind you of Korea. It is our great pleasure to send these boxes to former Peace Corps Volunteers as a token of our gratitude for your dedication to Korea.



Volunteers were overwhelmed by the thoughtfulness and generosity of these boxes. The contents did indeed bring back many memories. A wonderful and heart-warming story in the middle of a terrible year, this story was picked up by media both in the United States and in Korea. To see some of this coverage, visit: <https://www.friendsofkorea.net/remembering-in-the-time-of-covid-19.htm>



Annual Meeting 2020

The 2020 annual meeting was a virtual affair for the first time. Approximately 100 people from across the United States and beyond viewed the two-part event on November 7th. The first part was the annual membership meeting in which Gerry Krzic, the Friends of Korea President, provided the members and guests with an overview of the health and recent activities of the organization.

The program then shifted to the open program with a moderated discussion on the US and Korean alliance – its current status and future prospects. The discussants included Vincent K Brooks, General (US Army retired) and Tom Byrne, FoK Board member and President of The Korea Society. This discussion, of course, was particularly timely given the upcoming change in administration resulting from the outcome of the U.S. presidential election. This was followed by the presentation of 2020 Kevin O'Donnell Award - the honoree was Kenneth Klein, recently retired from his position as head of the East Asian Library at the University of Southern California (details below). The meeting ended with closing remarks by Ambassador Kathy Stephens on "Three Thoughts Post-Election."

Friends of Korea would like to thank The Korea Society for their technical support of this event.

To view the annual meeting program, visit the Friends of Korea website at:
<https://www.friendsofkorea.net/2020-annual-meeting---video.html>

Kevin O'Donnell Distinguished Friend of Korea Award

Friends of Korea (FoK) presented the fifth annual Kevin O'Donnell Distinguished Friend of Korea Award to Dr. Kenneth Klein, the recently retired Head of the East Asian Library at the University of Southern California.

For decades, Dr. Klein has shown himself to be dedicated to the mission of fostering cultural awareness and friendship between Americans and Koreans. He has consistently done so throughout his career as librarian of East Asian collections at the University of Southern California. His purview included the Korean Heritage Collection which is a part of the East Asian Library. Trained in both library science and the academic study of pre-modern Chinese history, Dr. Klein dedicated his career to the acquisition, preservation, and promotion of USC's East Asian Collection. This included the acquisition of important materials related to Korean and Korean American History through his many collaborations with both Korean American and Korean organizations and institutions.

In addition to overseeing the acquisition and preservation of materials for the Korean and Korean American collection at USC, Dr. Klein was active in promotion of cultural understanding between Americans and Koreans at particularly critical junctures. In 1993, he served on the Planning Committee for a conference on new directions for the Korean American community in the aftermath of the unrest of April 1992 in Los Angeles.

Among other outreach activities, Dr. Klein contributed to drafting a Senate resolution recognizing contributions of Korean Americans and advised the LA City Planning Department on important Asian American (including Korean American) monuments; mounted photo and other exhibits; gave papers and presentations at diverse venues; contributed to or edited newsletters or journals; produced documentary films and conducted numerous oral history interviews. More closely related to the Peace Corps/Korea experience, Dr. Klein, together with a colleague, conducted oral history interviews of former volunteers and oversaw the project to create the USC Peace Corps Digital Archives, a collection of photos and other contributions of former volunteers.

The Kevin O'Donnell Distinguished Friend of Korea Award recognizes individuals and their accomplishments that further cultural awareness and friendship between Americans and Koreans. This award is a tribute to the ground-breaking contributions made by Kevin O'Donnell, U.S. Peace Corps' first country director in Korea. O'Donnell is remembered for his extraordinary leadership which created the foundation for Peace Corps' successful 15-year commitment in Korea. Following his service in Korea, he served as the fourth director of the U.S. Peace Corps.

Giving Back Initiative

The *Giving Back Initiative*, which the FoK board launched in 2014, is the organization's primary philanthropic activity – broadly, it is about finding ways that we can give back to the country and the people with whom we have developed such a close and sustaining bond. Over \$50,000 has

been distributed to a variety of social service and educational institutions both in the United States and Korea since 2014.

In 2020, against the backdrop of the COVID-19 crisis, the Board approved a special grant program knowing that many nonprofits were facing an increased demand for services while, at the same time, facing an uncertain donor environment. Social service organizations which had already received support through this initiative were invited to apply. There were 5 organizations selected and each was awarded \$5,000. Each organization submitted a report in early 2021 outlining how the funds were spent and what the organization was able to accomplish.

Beneficiaries included over 190 families who received a variety of services (bereavement counseling as well as support in navigating the available social services such as unemployment and accessing disability and mental health services) as well as procurement and distribution of masks and other critical personal care items. Funds were also used to purchase computers for children to facilitate access to remote learning.

Loret Miller Ruppe Award

Named for the widely admired 10th Director of the Peace Corps, the annual Loret Miller Ruppe Award is presented by National Peace Corps Association (NPCA) to outstanding affiliate groups for projects that promote the Third Goal of Peace Corps — “strengthen Americans’ understanding about the world and its peoples” — or continue to serve host countries, build group spirit and cooperation, and promote service. Announcing the awards this year was Mary Ruppe Nash, daughter of Loret Miller Ruppe.

Friends of Korea received this award in recognition of the project initiated in 2016, to develop a “Study Guide to Accompany The Korean Transformation,” an easy-to-use manual for educators and workshop facilitators to use when teaching about the dramatic economic, social, and political development of Korea. The guide can be used independently or in conjunction with the “Korean Transformation” DVD (previously made by Friends of Korea). The Study Guide was planned for an initial printing of 40 copies for distribution — however, close to 300 were printed due to great demand. The Study Guide was promoted via electronic media, conference presentations, and teacher/young adult workshops.

The main purpose of the Study Guide was to promote a better understanding to the American public of the dramatic story of modern-day Korea’s development. In addition to the activities devoted to the story of Korea, the guide purposely included “extension” activities so that students can understand about the diversity in their local community, the Peace Corps and community service, and transformative learning — all of which lend themselves to the development of group spirit, cooperation, and the inclination to serve. The guide also helps Friends of Korea to stay connected with the country of service by spreading one unique story in particular: Korea is the first Peace Corps partner country in the world to launch its own government-funded overseas volunteer service corps, “World Friends Korea.”

Project Bridge Youth Ambassador Program

Since 2018, through a generous grant from the Pacific Century Institute, Friends of Korea has welcomed 32 new lifetime members. These young members were participants in the 2018 and the 2019 Project Bridge Youth Ambassadors (YA) Program.



Project Bridge, whose name captures the goal of reaching across ethnic and cultural divides, aims to help young people develop insights and skills needed to “bridge” the gaps between people of divergent cultural heritages. By fostering greater intercultural awareness and understanding, it empowers the youth ambassadors to view social and cultural differences as a pathway - not a barrier - to exercise their responsibilities as emerging young leaders in an increasingly interconnected and richly diverse world while educating them on the long-standing and close relationship between the peoples of Korea and the U.S.

The program was started in 1993 by [The Korea Society](#) in New York and the [Pacific Century Institute](#) in Los Angeles as a response to *Sa-I-Gu*, otherwise known as the 1992 Los Angeles riots. It cultivates students’ understanding of race relations using Korea as a case study and helps young Americans of diverse backgrounds build an understanding of the importance of the US-Korean relationship. It remains a signature program for both organizations.

Since 1993, each year 16 public high school junior or senior students—8 from New York City and 8 from Los Angeles—are selected through a rigorous vetting process. During the academic year, youth ambassadors participate in bi-monthly workshops and are introduced to a wide range of topics spanning Korean history, the Korean war, education, language, arts and cultural values, and *Sai-I-Gu* race riot. They explore current events, U.S. and regional relationships, and the economic factors that led to the ‘Miracle on the Han.’ Outside experts frequently lead lively and informative discussions.

While the program culminates in community presentations and a graduation ceremony, the study tour to the Republic of Korea is a high point of the program enabling students to experience Korea socially and culturally. During this all expenses paid ten-day tour students have abundant opportunities to engage with Korean high school students and teachers, corporate leaders, government officials, journalists, monks and many others as they travel around the country experiencing both city and rural life. In the past they have visited ministries, corporations, trade associations, museums, folk villages and universities. They have had home stays with high school students and an overnight stay at a Buddhist temple. Throughout the tour they gain a deeper understanding of the unique and close relationship between the U.S. and Korea

Friends of Korea will welcome a new cohort of students in 2021. In addition to the 16 students from New York and Los Angeles, four public high school students from Missoula, Montana will join. Last year the [Maureen and Mike Mansfield Center](#) at the University of Montana joined as a Project Bridge partner, introducing a rural demographic to the Program.

Through PCI's sponsorship of lifetime membership, Project Bridge students have opportunities for ongoing engagement with Korea, Koreans, and Korean Americans through FoK activities. Additionally, FoK has the opportunity to welcome and integrate into its structure a younger demographic advancing our ability to sustain our mission of fostering cultural awareness, understanding and friendship between Americans and Koreans.

The Youth Ambassadors are extremely talented, articulate, interesting and enthusiastic students. With our shared interest in Korea, they will be an integral part of Friends of Korea moving forward. We are delighted to welcome them!

Webinars

In addition to the virtual presentation by General Vincent Brooks (US Army retired), FoK hosted two other webinars in 2020. The first was a presentation by Paul Courtright (RPCV, Korea), who discussed his book *Witnessing Gwangju: A Memoir*. Paul described his experience and recollections as PCV in the city of Gwangju when the citizenry rose against the military government in their struggle to establish democracy in South Korea. The second webinar featured Victoria Kim, an LA Times correspondent based in Seoul. Victoria described her experiences in Korea as a Korean American reporter and the challenges of reporting during the COVID-19 pandemic. Both webinars were organized and conducted by Jenna Gibson and Ekaterina Mozhaeva, former Fulbright English Teaching Assistants in Korea and FoK Board members.

Korean Consuls General

Friends of Korea continued with its outreach to Korean Consuls General at the ten Korean Consulates throughout the U.S. We sent a letter to each consulate with greetings for the New Year and expressions of appreciation for their cooperation and collaboration during the past year. The number of activities between the Korean Consuls General and FoK were negatively impacted by COVID-19. However, in spite of the pandemic, FoK CG liaisons participated in live events honoring the Korean War armistice and virtual events that celebrated the Korea-America relationship and presentations discussing the impact of the outcome of the U.S. election on U.S.-Korea policy. Consul General Ahn Myung Soo of the Korean consulate in Houston attended the virtual annual meeting and has offered to assist with FoK's 2021 annual meeting scheduled for Austin pending COVID-19 conditions.

Governance

Two new members joined the Friends of Korea board at the fall annual meeting. They are Gregory Engle and Daniel Kim. Officers of the board are Gerry Krzic, President; James Mayer, Vice President; David Roden, Treasurer; Janice Gow Pettey Secretary; and Suzanne Crowder Han, Vice President. Nancy Kelly continues to serve as Chief Operating Officer (an unpaid position). For a full list of the board and their bios, visit the FoK website.

Membership & Communications

As of the November annual meeting, FoK had 276 dues paying members and a mailing list of just over 3900 names. There are also 24 donors and 4 honorary members. Our Facebook page, started in November of 2012, now has over 2708 followers. The FoK website attracted almost 4640 users in 2020 with 8860 page views. FoK continues to welcome anyone with an interest in enhancing cultural awareness of and friendship with Korea.

For more information on the various activities and ways to get involved in Friends of Korea, visit our website at www.friendsofkorea.net.

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