



Friends of Korea

Dedicated to fostering cultural awareness and
friendship between Americans and Koreans

Annual Report – 2018

Annual Meeting 2018

This year over 120 people gathered at the offices of The Korea Society in Manhattan, a beautiful venue, where they were treated to an afternoon of talks and tributes. The first speaker was Ambassador Cho Tae-yul, the representative of the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations. Ambassador Cho spoke about U.S. and Korean relations and the path forward to achieving ‘our shared dream of denuclearization and peace on the Korean Peninsula.’ The Ambassador’s remarks, while optimistic, also pointed out the many obstacles and hurdles that remain.

Another major component of the meeting was the Friends of Korea “Giving Back Initiative.” This year we recognized the work of two nonprofits in the New York area: CIDA and the Esther Ha Foundation. CIDA, which stands for Community Inclusion and Development Alliance, focuses on the promotion of self-determination and inclusion for individuals with disabilities. They focus on family support, education and workforce development. The Esther Ha Foundation implements programs that educate and provide community outreach in the area of mental health awareness, depression and suicide prevention. Both organizations serve the Korean-American community in the New York area and are relatively young organizations. We are delighted to have been able to provide some financial support to each and to recognize their commitment to helping their local communities.

We were delighted by the many new faces in attendance at the meeting. In particular there were several Project Bridge “Youth Ambassadors” sponsored by the Pacific Century Institute, as well as quite a few Fulbright English Teaching Assistants (ETAs), many recently returned from Korea.



New Faces: Fulbright ETAs



New Faces: Youth Ambassadors

As you might expect, the events culminated in a wonderful dinner – this year hosted by the Consul General of the Republic of Korea in New York, Ambassador Park Hyo-Sung. It was a delightful ending to the wonderful day of celebration.

Kevin O'Donnell Distinguished Friend of Korea Award

One of the highlights of the annual meeting was the presentation of the third Kevin O'Donnell Distinguished Friend of Korea Award to Mrs. Shim Jai Ok, a remarkable woman whose career has been devoted to promoting greater understanding and awareness between Americans and Koreans.



Gerry Krzic and Mrs. Shim

Mrs. Shim had worked as a Peace Corps language teacher and administrator before joining the Korean-American Educational Commission (the Fulbright Program) where she interacted with and impacted the lives of thousands of teachers, researchers and scholars. Many of her admirers were in the audience – some having traveled quite a distance to see her and to thank her. Given the high level of interest in this year's honoree, the award was broadcast via Facebook live.

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 and the fourth director of the Peace Corps. O'Donnell accepted the post in 1966, served for four years, and 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.

Since this initiative was launched in the fall of 2014, more than \$26,000 has been donated. Recipients have included:

- Los Angeles, 2014: Korean American Family Services
- Boston, 2015: National Assn of Korean American Inter-Cultural Family Mission & the Korean American Senior Citizen Association
- Washington, DC 2016: Virginia Korean American Disabled People's Association
- Ann Arbor, 2017: The Nam Center for Korean Studies at the University of Michigan
- Portage, Michigan, 2017: Korean Kids and Orphanage Outreach Mission (KKOOM)
- Annandale, VA, 2018: Korean Community Center Campaign
- New York, 2018: Community Inclusion and Development Alliance & the Esther Ha Foundation

2018 revisit



More than 80 people participated in the 9th revisit to Korea in the fall of 2018. Hosted by the Korean government, these week-long trips are a remarkable opportunity for former Peace Corps volunteers and their family members to return to Korea and witness first-hand the remarkable economic, social and technological advances of the past 40 years. For those who have not returned since the end of their service, the visit to their sites and the reconnection with former co-workers, language teachers, **students** and other volunteers is truly an emotional high point.

Some highlights of this week were a welcome lunch hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a tour of the new National Museum of Korea, a trip to the Korean Folk Village, a tour of the DMZ, a visit and luncheon with volunteers and staff at KOICA, and a wonderful farewell dinner hosted by the Korea Foundation. President Lee Sihyung of the Korea Foundation, expressed his gratitude for the bonds of friendship that former volunteers have retained over the years. He also was most impressed by the musical talent of several volunteer who gave an impromptu performance of some traditional folk songs.

Outreach - Korean Embassy

The Ambassador of the Republic of Korea, Cho Yoon-je, hosted an intimate thank you dinner in December of 2018 at the Korean Cultural Center in Washington, DC. Approximately 30 former Peace Corps volunteers and family members were treated to an evening of music, wonderful Korean food and-remarks by Korean Embassy and FoK representatives. Prior to the dinner, the volunteers and their guests were given an exclusive “behind the scenes” tour of the restored Old Korean Legation, the first Korean diplomatic mission in the United States in 1889.

Outreach - 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.

During 2018, FoK Liaisons worked on projects with Korean Consulates in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Chicago, New York, Boston and Washington, D.C. As a result of the outreach initiative, the Korean Consulate in New York assisted with the Friends of Korea annual meeting in New York and generously hosted a dinner for all of the participants.

The Consul General in San Francisco indicated an interest in hosting the 2019 annual meeting.

Governance

Two new members joined the Friends of Korea board at the fall annual meeting. They are Christy Gavitt and Todd Wilkinson. Officers of the board are Gerry Krzic, President; Nancy Kelly, Vice President; James Mayer, Treasurer; Robert Ichihana, Secretary; and Suzanne Crowder Han, Vice President. For a full list of the board and their bios, visit the FoK website.

Membership & Communications

As of the November annual meeting, FoK had 253 dues paying members and a mailing list of just over 2500 names. Our Facebook page, started in November of 2012, now has over 2400 followers, a 33% increase over the previous year. The FoK website attracted almost 4300 users in 2018 (up from 3576 in 2017) and they viewed 10, 600 pages. 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. We encourage you to sign up for our newsletter as well.