

Club's a force for friendship, meets in Niagara Falls

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It's an organization that's not exactly a household name, but Friendship Force has come a long way since its founding more than 30 years ago.

"It's quite a world movement," said Friendship Force International president George Brown.

He and more than 100 members of Friendship Force chapters from across Canada were in Niagara Falls yesterday for their bi-annual conference.

The organization, which has had a chapter here in Niagara for more than a decade, is a worldwide network of clubs that promote global understanding through cross-cultural exchanges.

Since its founding in 1977, Friendship Force has brought together millions of people. In 2007 alone, nearly 6,000 friendship ambassadors travelled between 58 countries, with thousands more serving as hosts.

"There's an idealistic side that says if more people did this you can break down the barriers that separate people," said Brown.

The Niagara chapter was founded in 1998. It currently has about 100 members, says Niagara president Bill Harkness.

During his nine years as a member of Friendship Force, Harkness has participated in exchanges with various clubs across the United States and has ventured to more distant points, including New Zealand, Peru and Chili.

More information about the organization and the Niagara chapter can be found online at www.ffniagara.org.