

Community bands together for Ukraine



By Nate Smelle

On Feb. 24 Russia invaded Ukraine, causing Europe's largest refugee crisis since the Second World War. According to the United Nations, at least 12 million Ukrainians have been forced out of their homes as a result of the invasion. As of June 26, the UN human rights office recorded 10,631 civilian casualties throughout the country ? 4,731 dead and 5,900 injured. In response to the crisis, Tetyana Moiseyeva has taken action to help Ukrainians escaping the war, as well as those still living amid the warfare. At first, Moiseyeva said the fundraising campaign got started when she began sending financial donations to her friends and family in Ukraine. She then decided to expand the campaign by collecting items currently in high demand in Ukraine, and shipping them directly to those in need. Teaming up with the publisher of The Eganville Leader, Gerald Tracey, Moiseyeva next decided to organize a fundraising event that was held in Eganville on June 17 . Expressing her gratitude to everyone who helped to make the event a success, she indicated that she plans to build on that success by continuing her campaign for Ukraine. "It is important for people to support this campaign because this a real life matter, and a genuine life or death situation," said Moiseyeva. Our actions, are saving the lives of many. These donations do not go through government or other organizations, it goes directly to those in need. No admission is collected either. "Recognizing that many Ukrainians are now urgently seeking sanctuary in other countries, Moiseyeva has opened up her home to Vita Aharkova, a Ukrainian woman fleeing the war. Since then, she said Aharkova's sister Yulia and her two children were also able to come to Canada, and are now living with one of her friends near Barry's Bay. "The biggest need right now, is housing," explained Moiseyeva. "We have many refugees looking for housing to flee Europe/Ukraine. We have many job opportunities, just no where for them to stay. If anyone is willing to accept families or even individuals, it would be beyond appreciated." Providing insight into what life is like in Ukraine since the Russians invaded, Aharkova shared her experience of the war before coming to Canada. Following the invasion, Aharkova said a huge number of women with children began to travel to safer regions of the country and beyond, "to protect their children from all this horror." At the same time, a massive number of men signed up for the military to defend their homeland and protect their families from what she calls the "Russian plague." "Each of us has some relatives or friends at the front now, and some abroad," said Aharkova. "Those who remained began to unite in groups to help each other and our country." Acknowledging the devastating impact that the conflict has had on Ukraine already, Aharkova said her home country has changed a lot in the first days of the war. Finding a ray of hope amid the terror, she reflected on how people have rallied together to protect their families, communities, and country. "A great misfortune united the vast majority of people - we became one big family," Aharkova said. "It was impossible to sit at home and watch everything that was happening from the side. We all became volunteers. Men made anti-tank devices, poured sand, built defensive structures to protect the city, and women united and weaved camouflage nets, sewed raincoats, linen, bulletproof vests for the military, cooked food, fried pies, collected clothes, shoes and other things for internally displaced persons, for hospitals and for our defenders. Information about the

needs of our military, in hospitals, in centers for the reception of internally displaced persons regularly appeared in telegram channels. Few remained indifferent. Everyone tried to help in any way they could: someone gave money, someone brought food, bought medicine, someone delivered food to the front line, someone just gave all their free time to the common cause. Even homeless people collected bottles to make Molotov cocktails."While working in one of the community volunteer groups during the first days of the war, Aharkova said many caring people showed up to share what they have, and ask how they could be useful. Unfortunately, with every day the war wages on, people become poorer, and more people have less to share, because many people have lost their jobs or businesses. With the situation growing more dire by the day, Aharkova said she and her family now begin every day corresponding with relatives and friends still living in different cities throughout Ukraine."Just a few lines, to make sure that everything is in order. When someone does not get in touch, it causes serious unrest and anxiety," Aharkova said. Adding to Aharkova's feeling of unrest and anxiety are her memories of living in a war zone. Describing her firsthand experience of the horrors of war, she said they "constantly heard the sounds of explosions, because the front line was very close to our city. Many times rockets flew into the city. It's scary, but we have learned to overcome these fears by supporting and helping each other, engaging ourselves in the work of volunteer groups." "We are very worried about everyone, we want all this hell to end as soon as possible," added Aharkova. "Many thousands of people are no longer alive, many thousands have become disabled, dozens of cities have been destroyed, hundreds of villages have been wiped off the face of the Earth, many thousands of houses have been destroyed to the ground. Some will never return to Ukraine, because there is nowhere to return, someone will never know about the fate of one of their loved ones, since it is impossible to know who remained under the ruins of bombed-out houses and how many people the doctors could not save. My country is tired of this war, it is partially destroyed, people are exhausted, the fate of millions of people is crippled!" Before leaving Ukraine, Aharkova said a huge number of people in a worse situation than they were in, arrived in their home city of Zaporizhzhia. Tragically, she said most of these people had lost children, parents, friends, or relatives; and were rendered homeless by the war. Through communicating with these people, she said they were able to empathize with their pain and experience it as if it was their own. Hearing their struggles, Aharkova said, helped her appreciate how happy she and her family are to be alive, and have a place to sleep and something to eat."At such moments, you begin to understand how much there is unimportant in our life and what is really important," Aharkova said. "We have learned to live one day [at a time], because we do not know what will happen tomorrow or in five minutes. The air raid siren sounds constantly. This sound is impossible to forget, as well as the fact that it is usually followed by explosions, but no one knows where this time they will be and how many lives they will take." As difficult as it was to leave Ukraine while it is in a state of crisis, Aharkova said she and her sister Yulia decided to come to Canada to save the lives and health of their children. Thankful for the warm reception they have received since arriving in Canada, she said "this is a beautiful country with amazing people. We did not expect to receive such support, care and attention. I want to thank: the government of Canada for the opportunity, assistance and support; the families of Tetyana Moiseyeva and David Shulist for care, shelter, support and help in all matters; as well as all the caring people of Barry's Bay, Wilno, Eganville, Pembroke and many other cities that sympathize with my people and help us in every possible way and those like us as temporary migrants." Aharkova hopes that her family's stay in Canada will be of some use to Ukraine. Since arriving here in Canada, she said she has met a lot of people who empathize with what is happening in her country and want to help."I admire Canadians for their huge hearts and I am very grateful for the help provided," Aharkova said. "My country needs help, your help!" For more information on Moiseyeva's campaign for Ukraine; or to make a donation, contact Tetyana Moiseyeva at: tmoiseyeva@bell.net; or (416) 460-6377. More information can also be found at: www.weloveua.ca.