



*The Monthly Newsletter of the Rotary Club of Easton*



**March 2023**

*The Rotary Club of Easton was the first Rotary Club in the world in a town of less than 10,000*



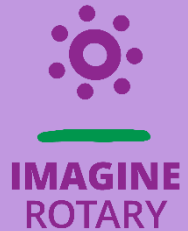
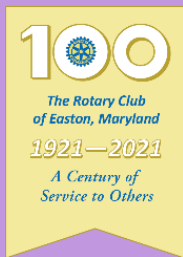
*Iryna & Frank Gunsallus at the Easton Rotary Christmas party – December 2022*

## *Dedication*

The March issue of *The Spark* is dedicated to Frank & Iryna Gunsallus for their incredible work on behalf of the Ukrainian people.

Rotary magazine's two-part story entitled, *Life during wartime*, which appeared in the magazine in February & March, is reprinted in this issue. Please read it and take in every word. Whatever we feel our problems are here in Talbot County, and whatever political statements one could make about what is happening in Ukraine, there's no question about the unimaginable human tragedy and sacrifice that has been all so unnecessary. No question about the heroism either. We should never forget and never stop our good work, just as Frank & Iryna have not stopped theirs.

The places and names in the articles may sound familiar. That's because Frank & Iryna did groundbreaking work in Poland, some of which was covered in *The Spark*. A few of those stories appear after *Life during wartime*.



## *The Coffee Bean With President Kelly*

The word “march” means to move in a purposeful manner, which is exactly what Rotarians do to provide service to their own communities. Let’s all “march” to provide service to our community.

“March” is also named for the Roman god of war, Mars. However, we think of it as the beginning of spring, as March brings the vernal equinox, the Full Worm Moon, and the return of Daylight Savings Time. March may be named after the Roman god of war, but in reality, it's one of the happiest months on the calendar. Flowers are budding, chocolate and girl scout cookies are on sale, and its major holiday is just one giant party, with no gifts and minimal stress – Happy St. Patrick's Day!

The Rotary International theme for March is “**Water and Sanitation.**” They ask Rotarians to focus on the life-changing improvements that we can make through these international projects to provide a more readily available and healthy supply of water to all people. Think about giving to the Rotary Foundation (<https://www.rotary.org/en/about-rotary/rotary-foundation>) or Disaster Aid USA (<https://disasteraidusa.org/>) to help those abroad in either Ukraine or Turkey.

Whether you choose to “march” locally or internationally, please consider marching into March with optimism, hope and the desire to provide Service above Self!

Respectfully submitted,

*Kelly*





## *St. Mark's United Methodist Church ♦ Easton, MD*



The Rotary Club of Easton is beyond grateful to St. Mark's United Methodist Church for contributing \$20,000– yes, **Twenty-Thousand Dollars**– to the Rotary Club of Easton's Youth and Community Fund. \$10,000 goes to Operation Christmas Spirit and \$10,000 to the Drop for Scotty Community Food Drive. There are no words big enough to convey our thanks, but

# Thank You!

Your contribution will touch and improve countless lives.



# HEROES BLOOD DRIVE



## Heroes Blood Drive Update

President Elect Nominee and Heroes Blood Drive Chair, Sherye Nickerson, reports:

We have raised \$931 in monetary donations.

We still need Rotarians to apply to be trained volunteers.

Next blood drives are at the Easton Fire House on March 8, 2023, and April 11, 2023.

There are blood drives at Cambridge Immanuel Church and at St. Luke's in Denton on March 23, 2023.

**Rotary Only Blood Drive** is on May 4, 2023, from 10am to 3pm at the Community Center. Call the Blood Bank 1-888-BLOOD-8 to make your appointment or contact Sherye so she can make the appointment for you.

You can contact Sherye at [sheryeh@gmail.com](mailto:sheryeh@gmail.com) or 410-829-0377.







## Rotary District #7630 Hero Blood Drive in 2023

Blood is needed daily by patients in our local hospitals. You can help!  
Rotary District #7630 is supporting the Blood Bank of Delmarva.



### Schedule an appointment to give blood

<https://donate.bbd.org/donor/schedules/zip>

Or call 888-8blood8 (888-825-6638)

**AND immediately** Email Sherye Nickerson at [sheryeh@gmail.com](mailto:sheryeh@gmail.com) for tracking purposes



### Make a financial contribution

- Online giving: <https://www.delmarvablood.org/get-involved/donate-money/rotary-district-7630-hero-blood-and-fundraising-drive/>
- Or mail check to:
  - Blood Bank of Delmarva, Division of NY Blood Center Enterprises, PO Box 419354, Boston, MA 02241-9354
  - In **Memo** add: **Rotary District #7630**



### Volunteer

- <https://www.delmarvablood.org/get-involved/volunteer/>
- Volunteer at a local center or mobile near you giving donors attention, care, and snacks and drinks



# ROTARY

February 2023

## Life during wartime

**An exclusive frontline  
account chronicles Rotary's  
response to the humanitarian  
crisis in Ukraine** page 24

**Hope flows from  
a water project  
in Lebanon**  
page 14

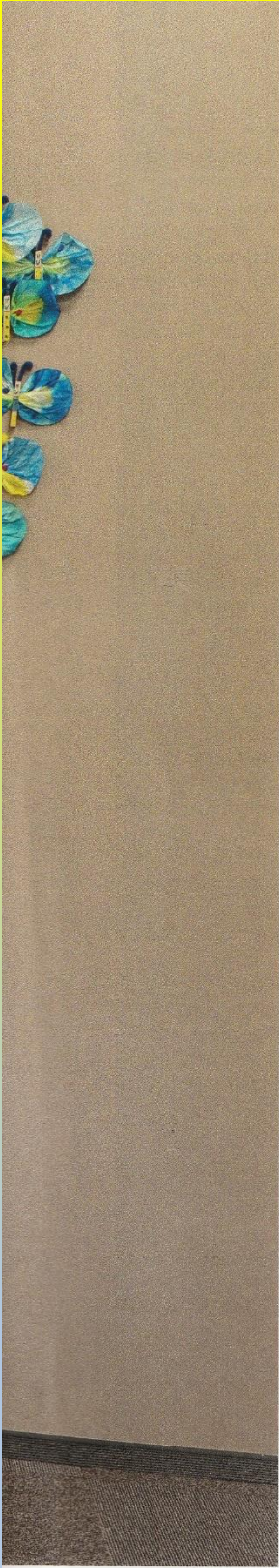
**Pedal power:  
a two-wheeled  
transit toward  
a better life**  
page 34

**A peace fellow's  
perpetual journey**  
page 50









A FRONTLINE REPORT

# LIFE DURING WARTIME

PART I: POLAND

As the first anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine approached, *Rotary* magazine's **Wen Huang** traveled to Europe to see firsthand how Rotary members are responding to this humanitarian crisis. In the first installment of his two-part report, Huang visits Poland en route to Ukraine.

**Photography by Ed Zirkle**



## TUESDAY, 7:45 P.M., WARSAW

A glittering, guitar-shaped sign for a Hard Rock Cafe welcomes me when I step out of Warsaw Central Railway Station. I snap a photo and send it to a journalist friend whose wife used to collect Hard Rock Cafe T-shirts from former communist countries. She and other pop culture experts believe that there is a strong relationship between rock 'n' roll and the fall of communism in Eastern Europe. From my perspective, the sign is one example of a loud declaration of Poland's modern identity.

When I turn to take in the rest of Warsaw's central landscape, I am confronted by the Palace of Culture and Science, a hulking edifice that rises nearly 800 feet and remains the second-tallest building in Poland. Begun in 1952 and completed after Stalin's death, this Soviet-style high-rise that resembles the Empire State Building was a "gift" from Moscow to its unruly satellite. At night, the Poles light the building in hues of yellow and blue, Ukraine's national colors, in solidarity with their besieged neighbor. This symbol of Poland's communist past overlooks nearby shopping centers decked with Christmas lights and neon signs proclaiming Western fashion brands.

It is approaching 8 p.m., and though I am inspecting my surroundings outside the train station, my thoughts are focused on the days ahead. During my career as a journalist, I have covered international crises, violent revolutions, and natural disasters around the world. So I wanted to visit Ukraine to see for myself the conditions for millions of Ukrainians who have suffered and endured since Russia invaded in late February 2022.

From my home in Chicago, I followed news of the war closely. Working for Rotary, I received near-daily reports of members' efforts to assist Ukrainians, including those forced to flee to neighboring countries. At *Rotary* magazine, where I am the editor in chief, we held weekly video meetings early on with Ukrainian Rotary members, and in the first three months of the invasion, we watched as The Rotary Foundation collected \$15 million to support initiatives helping people affected by the war. All this only increased my desire to experience firsthand the *esprit de corps* of the humanitarian army that has rushed to Ukraine's aid.

An unexpected opportunity to do just that came last fall as I vacationed in Berlin. Mykola Stebljanko, who publishes *Rotariets*, Rotary's regional magazine in Ukraine, invited me to visit Lviv, the largest city in western Ukraine. Since Lviv is close to the Polish border, he suggested that I join him and other Rotary members at a Foundation seminar there. All I had to do was get to Warsaw, and everything would fall into place from there.



This is why I am lingering in the Polish capital this October night beneath the Hard Rock Cafe sign waiting for Paulina Konopka, the charter president of the Rotaract Club of Warszawa City. Pola, as the 30-year-old Rotaractor likes to be called, takes me to a nearby restaurant, where, over a pepperoni pizza, she tells me she was on a plane to Maldives with her family when the war began. Soon after she landed, she contacted her fellow Rotaractors in Warsaw to brainstorm ways to help. "In that first month, our whole country, from government to businesses, seemed to have stopped to help refugees in Poland and people in Ukraine," she says. "As a member of Rotary, you just instinctively want to help."

Using social media, the Warsaw Rotaractors appealed to friends in other countries for donations. With the Rotaract Club of Wilanów International, Pola's club set up a long-term home in a suburb for about 40 Ukrainian women and children and organized social events for the refugees, from cooking to disco parties. Club members visited them on Saturdays, bringing them gift cards and driving them to stores. "We also meet every week to teach refugees Polish and English and help them acclimate to life in their new country," Pola says.

A month after the war started, Poland had welcomed some 2 million Ukrainian refugees; about 300,000 lived in Warsaw, but many have since returned to their country, including about half of the 40 people who had lived at the Rotary shelter. "Many people simply missed their homelands and their husbands, brothers, and grandparents," Pola explains. The end of some food and transportation subsidies granted by the Polish government, as well as high energy and food costs as a result of the war, might also be contributing factors. Pola says that she and her fellow Rotaractors will continue to help those who remain find jobs and learn Polish.

As Russia intensified its bombardment of Ukrainian cities throughout the fall, Pola said that people might be forced to flee again to Poland, and the

**Previous pages:** The Ukrainian Support and Education Center, established by Polish Rotary clubs **Left:** Pola Konopka, charter president of the Rotaract Club of Warszawa City **Opposite:** Warsaw's Palace of Culture and Science

PHOTOGRAPH: WEN HUANG







Warsaw Rotaractors “will prepare to welcome and help them.”

Back at the bar of my hotel, I spot Ed Zirkle, a Rotarian from Ohio who’s a photographer and documentarian. “When I saw on TV the injustices done in Ukraine, I felt that I had to be there and document it,” he says, sipping his vodka on the rocks. So when he learned that the Rotary Club of Lviv was hosting a Foundation seminar, he decided to journey to Ukraine, hoping that he could meet up with Rotary members and get them to take him around the country. His request was forwarded to Mykola Stebljanko, who suggested that we travel together. Now, both Ed and I are awaiting further instructions.

### WEDNESDAY, 10:15 A.M., KONSTANCIN-JEZIORNA

The next morning, Jacek Malesa, past president of the Rotary Club of Warszawa Fryderyk Chopin, invites us to visit a refugee center established by Rotary clubs in Konstancin-Jeziorna, a historical town south of Warsaw. Malesa, 58, took the day off work as a media company auditor to accompany us. Volunteering for Rotary, he says, is more fun.

The Ukrainian Support and Education Center is housed inside a three-story concrete building on a quiet street near the center of town. Its walls are freshly decorated with blue and yellow paper butterflies crafted for the children of Ukraine by U.S. students in New Hampshire. We visit a simply furnished room where two girls and four boys sit around a large table, drawing eyes and noses on a yellow paper cut in the shape of hands. A bit timid at first, they soon warm to us and are chattering enthusiastically. I catch snippets of what they’re saying as the translators struggle to keep up with the conversation.

The children came from the Ukrainian cities of Kyiv, Kherson, and Kharkiv. “Their fathers served in the military, and they came here with their mothers and siblings,” Malesa says. “Separating from their loved ones is hard on them. You should have seen them when they first arrived. They were not responsive to care and non-communicative. The care we provide has dramatically improved their condition.”

At the end of the drawing class, the teachers take the children outside for a break. Inside a small tennis court at a nearby park, a boy wearing a blue jacket and a hat that says “I ♥ Dad” moves to a corner and toys with a soccer ball. His eyes betray traces of sadness. A woman in a red sweater walks over to the boy and gives him a big hug. The woman, 36-year-old Luliia Cherkasbyna, is the boy’s counselor. She came from Kyiv and has been in Warsaw since the start of the war. Back home, she counseled autistic teenagers struggling with socialization issues. “I enjoy working at the Rotary center because I feel I’m doing something for the future of my country,” she says.

In June, before the center opened, Rotarians invited top-tier psychotherapists from Israel to train Ukrainian psychologists to treat and counsel children. “See,” she says, gesturing toward the children, “they’re smiling. It’s very rewarding to see the difference that Rotary and other kind-hearted Polish people have made on these children.”

The children came from the Ukrainian cities of Kyiv, Kherson, and Kharkiv. **“Separating from their loved ones is hard on them,”** says Jacek Malesa, a member of a Warsaw Rotary club. **“You should have seen them when they first arrived.”**

### WEDNESDAY, 3:30 P.M., WARSAW

Malesa takes us to a traditional Polish restaurant nestled in the woods. As we eat our bowls of borscht and wait for our orders of beef tartare, pierogi, and pancakes, Malesa hands me his cell phone. Michał Skup, president of the Rotary Club of Warszawa Fryderyk Chopin, is on the line with an update about our travel plans: Zirkle and I are to head to the Polish town of Zamość, where Ukrainian Rotarians will meet us to accompany us across the border to Lviv in a couple of days.

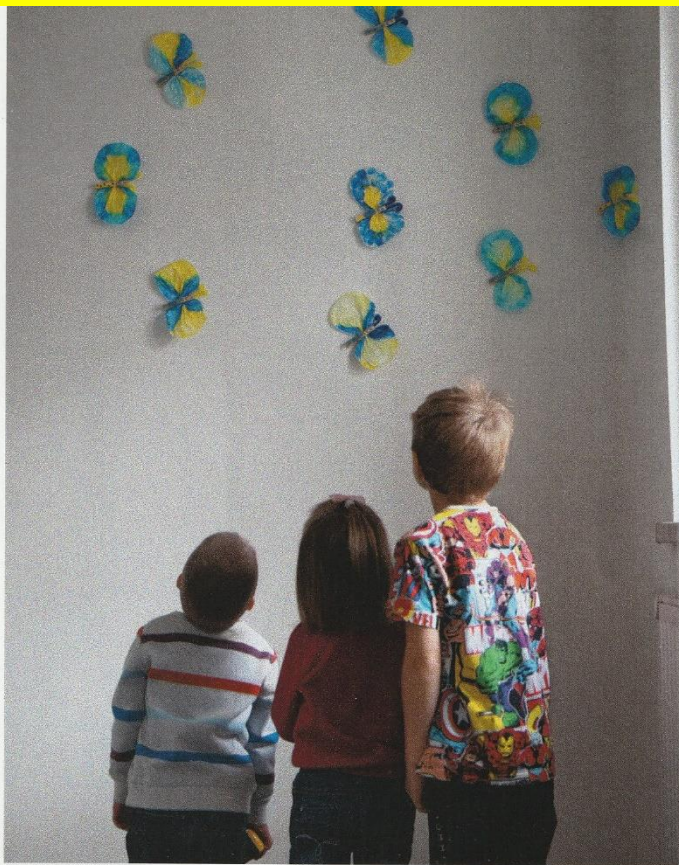
Since Skup’s club is named after my favorite composer, I suggest that, before we depart for Zamość, we meet at Łazienki Park in central Warsaw and take a photo in front of the Chopin statue.

Dressed in a dark blue sports jacket over a white shirt, the spectacled Skup, the general counsel for an international corporation’s Warsaw branch, looks dashing fit. He has recently completed a 10-day bike tour from Warsaw to Tuscany, Italy, covering about 1,000 miles to raise money to purchase a minivan for the refugee center. After I describe my visit to the center, Skup shares in English — he spent a better part of his teenage years living in the United States — some behind-the-scenes stories about the center’s creation.

People in Poland were in shock when Russia invaded Ukraine, and many filled up their gas tanks, worried they might have to escape if Russia also targeted Poland, he recalls. “My wife packed our stuff and was ready to run away if the Russians came,” he says. “Fortunately, our fear was alleviated by the kindness of so many good people around the world. They contacted us through our club websites, via email or phone, asking us how they can help.”

Skup and others formed a working group that, at its peak, included representatives from 14 Rotary clubs or districts around the world. They held weekly video meetings to discuss ways to raise funds and offer relief. “At the beginning, we had no idea how long the war would last,” Skup says. “Many refugees were in standby mode, with-





**Clockwise from left:** Blue and yellow butterflies, crafted by students in New Hampshire, adorn the walls of the Ukrainian Support and Education Center; a child at the center shows off an art project; Lul'iaa Cherkasbyna, a counselor from the center, watches over the children as they visit the ducks at a nearby park.



PHOTOGRAPH: (CHERKASBYNA) WEN HUANG



out an idea about what to do next. They needed support to try to build resilience and lead a normal life, especially the children. I believed this war wouldn't end quickly, so we needed to think of helping refugees in a sustainable way."

In September, with the help of The Rotary Foundation's disaster response grants and with donations from local corporations, individuals, and Rotary members in Germany, Canada, Japan, Korea, and the United States, the group opened the center. It hired and trained psychologists, teachers, and a center manager — nearly all of them Ukrainian refugees — to provide counseling and education for children and others traumatized by the war. "The whole thing is so surreal to me," Skup says. "Even though we're experiencing so much evil in Ukraine, all these good Rotary people were coming to us out of their own volition, offering their help. The amount of goodness is just incredible."

During the conversation, Skup mentions the name Alex Ray more than once. A member of the Rotary Club of Plymouth, New Hampshire, Ray provided more than \$300,000 to the center. "He's in Ukraine," Skup says. "You might run into him."

Skup echoes what Pola told me the previous evening, that more people could seek refuge in Poland if Russia escalates the war. With that in mind, and with the benefit of Ray's donation, Skup and his colleagues in Rotary hope to make a long-term commitment to expanding the center to provide day care, vocational and language training, psychological help, and basic medical services to refugees from other countries, including Russia and Belarus. "We're a relatively small club, with 17 members," Skup says. "But our clear commitment to helping others is driving membership, and we're expecting at least three new members soon."

With that, Skup strikes a pose in front of the Chopin monument, stretching his arms wide and holding his club's flag. After taking his photo, I study the sculpture, which was erected in 1926, destroyed by the German army in 1940, and restored in 1958. It's then I notice an inscription engraved on the statue's pedestal: "Flames will consume our painted history, sword-wielding thieves will plunder our treasures, the song will be saved."

The words come from a poem by Adam Mickiewicz, considered by some to be Poland's greatest poet, but they could just as easily have been written about Ukraine.

## THURSDAY, 5:15 P.M., ZAMOŚĆ

Warsaw to Zamość is a four-hour bus ride through the Polish countryside. When Zirkle and I step off the bus at dusk, Google Maps indicates that we are less than 40 miles from the border with Ukraine. Darkness soon envelops us, and the October air carries the pungent smell of burning wood. With skyrocketing energy costs, many families here and throughout Europe are using fireplaces and wood-burning stoves to heat their homes.

Zamość is built on a medieval trade route connecting western and northern Europe with the Black Sea. Designed by the Italian architect Bernardo Morando, the city was overrun by the Nazis in World War II despite the brave resistance of its residents, many of whom died. The Nazis then systematically rounded up Jews for deportation to the death camps. I suspect this tragic history of subjugation contributed to the amazing empathy the townspeople have shown during this latest crisis. In a news report in March, officials said about 4,000 refugees had found shelter in the city.

The Morando hotel lies on the edge of the charming and lovingly restored Great Market Square, which resembles an Italian piazza. On the perimeter of this perfect square, multicolored Renaissance buildings stand shoulder

**From left:** Alex Ray helps unload needed supplies; Steve Rand, Ray, and Ryszard Łuczyn, a Rotarian in Zamość, collect boxes of sleeping bags at a warehouse in Chelm, Poland, before entering Ukraine. **Opposite:** Michał Skup and Jacek Malesa stand in front of Warsaw's inspiring Chopin monument.



PHOTOGRAPHS: (N.H. CLUB) COMMON MAN FOR UKRAINE/STEVE RAND







to shoulder, their rooflines mimicking the 16th century architecture. As Zirkle and I haul our luggage into the palatial lobby, we run into Alex Ray, just as Skup had predicted. Ray had raised \$1.3 million with the help of friends, all of it destined to fund humanitarian projects in Ukraine — and then nearly matched those donations with \$1 million of his own money.

The owner of the popular Common Man family of restaurants in New Hampshire, Ray, mild-mannered and unassuming, is traveling with Steve Rand, fellow Rotarian and his friend of 40 years, as well as their partners, Lisa Mure and Susan Mathison. They have just returned from their second trip to Ukraine to identify what kinds of things were most urgently needed as Ukrainians were preparing to begin a dark and cold winter made worse by the loss of electric power.

“Last March, when we saw images of Russian tanks rolling into Ukraine, it felt immensely oppressive,” says Rand, a 78-year-old hardware store owner. “It was like a World War II-type of military operation in real time. All the machines of war are being used against a civilian population that had very little ability to fend for themselves.”

Ray nods in agreement. “This is a one-way aggression, unfair and unjust,” he says. “We feel empathy toward the innocent civilians who are going through this tragedy. It parallels those hurricane victims whom we have helped in the U.S., except that nobody could figure out how our help could reach Ukraine.”

Since Ray and Rand are members of the Rotary Club of Plymouth, New Hampshire, they found their solution through the organization. “We decided to use our Rotary network in Poland and Ukraine, making them a conduit,” Ray says. “In this way, we can assure our donors that the money would go directly on the ground to people in Ukraine.”

Ray and his big-hearted friends decided to raise money in their home state. Their efforts have won the support of local politicians, a radio station, a minor-league baseball team, and local nonprofit organizations such as the Granite United Way, which served as the campaign’s fiscal agent. Ray also involved his 850 restaurant workers, who distribute cards and pamphlets to customers. “We’re proud that New Hampshire, with a population of 1.38 million, is able to donate about one dollar for each of the state’s residents,” says Mure, Ray’s partner.

Ray says that they are expanding beyond New Hampshire. He and his friends conducted a reconnaissance mission in Poland and Ukraine last summer and identified six projects, including the refugee center established by Skup and his club, and a bloodmobile purchased by the Rotary Club of Kraków to support hospitals in Ukraine. They have purchased and distributed about 700 tons of food through Rotary members in Zamość. “Now we’re adding sleeping bags and generators,” he says. “The reason we have success is because of the Rotary clubs here. They knew the situation in Ukraine and take the responsibility to use our funds and deliver the aid to where it’s needed.”

Feeling a bit jittery about my impending trip into Ukraine, I ask the travelers if they had been concerned about their safety. “My trip in May was my first time to cross into a war zone,” replies Mathison, whom I jokingly call the public relations manager of the group for her eagerness to share its story. “I’m just a regular middle-aged, middle-class mom. I never thought I would find myself there. Before we left for Lviv, our host warned that there had been bombings and asked if we still wanted to go. I thought to myself: There are millions of Ukrainians who wake

up every day to bombings and find the courage to feed and clothe their kids and keep them safe. If they can do that, it’s my job to do it for a couple of days and then leverage that experience to help them in the long-run.”

The four go on to describe what they saw in Ukraine: a convention center and Soviet-era military barracks converted into rudimentary refugee shelters, a makeshift warehouse coordinating emergency food deliveries into eastern Ukraine, and a run-down orphanage that they were able to help rebuild. And Ray praises his new Rotary friends in Poland for their limitless generosity: “Our organization — Rotary — gives us the power to help.”

Their October trip reinforced the fears of a cold winter for children in Ukraine. Ray and his friends returned to Ukraine in mid-December. During the trip, he dressed as Father Frost and delivered 18 tons of food, 1,000 sleeping bags, and 24 generators, as well as 1,300 Christmas packages, to orphanages in the cities of Lviv and Rivne.

Our interview might have gone on for another hour if the foursome had not been called in to dinner. I head up to my hotel room, and as I enter, my phone begins to ring. It’s Piotr Pajdowski, president of the Rotary Club of Warszawa-Belweder. He tells me to be ready: Two Rotarians will arrive at the hotel in the morning and escort me and the photographer across the border.

At 9 a.m., Vasyl Polonskyy and Hennadii Kroichyk stroll into the hotel lobby, where the quartet from New Hampshire and a Rotary member from Zamość are waiting to check out. The mere mention of Rotary removes any language or cultural barriers among this group of strangers, and we greet one another warmly as if old friends. The conversations are so animated, we drop our bags into a jumble on the tiles.

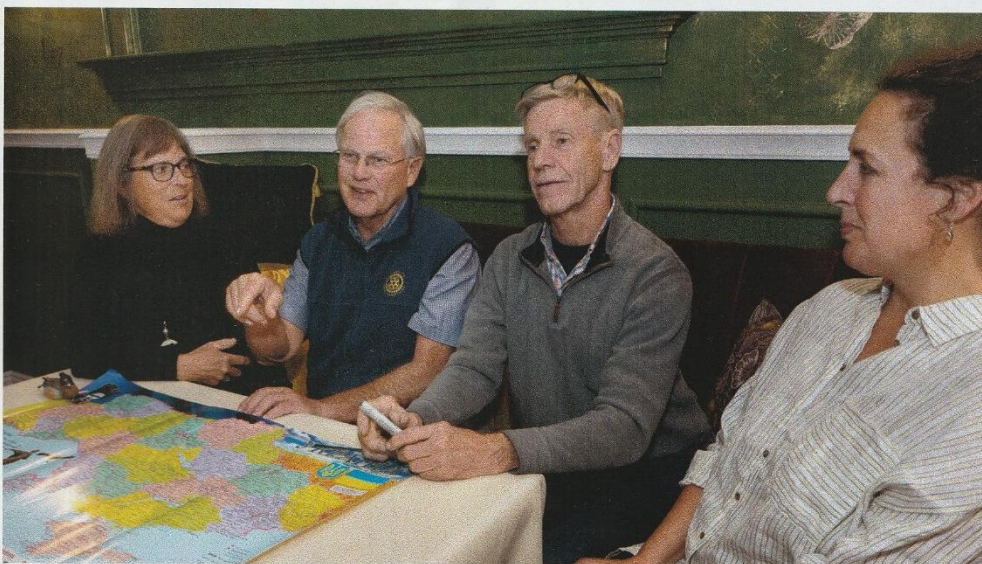
Then, we are off.

Polonskyy pauses to drive me around the scenic parts of Zamość twice for good luck, which we sorely need for our next stop: Ukraine. ■

*Next month: In the March issue of Rotary, Wen Huang concludes his report as he visits Lviv, the cultural capital of Ukraine and a city under siege.*

Alex Ray praises his new Rotary friends in Poland for their limitless generosity. **“Our organization — Rotary — gives us the power to help.”**





**Above:** The town hall in the Old City of Zamość **Left:** A humanitarian quartet — (from left) Susan Mathison, Rand, Ray, and Lisa Mure — study a map at the Morando hotel in Zamość.



A FRONTLINE REPORT

# LIFE DURING WARTIME

PART II: UKRAINE

Last fall, as the first anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine approached, *Rotary* magazine's **Wen Huang** traveled to Europe to see this humanitarian crisis firsthand. In the second installment of his two-part report, Huang visits Lviv, where he witnesses the resilience of the Ukrainian people and the wide reach of Rotary's global network.







PHOTOGRAPH: WEN HUANG

As an act of defiance, young people get on with their lives in Lviv's Old Town.





## FRIDAY, 10 A.M., SOUTHEASTERN POLAND

"I can smell Ukraine now," exclaims Vasyl Polonsky with a broad smile on his boyish face. "We are getting very close to the border."

We're zooming through southeastern Poland on a newly paved country road. Polonsky pokes his head out the window and takes a deep breath. I do the same but fail to catch the scent of anything distinctively Ukrainian. Polonsky reads my thoughts. "Only we Ukrainians can detect the unique smell of our land," he says. "Each time I return from trips abroad, I always know I'm home, just from the smell of it. I love my country very much, and the war has only made my love stronger."

I met Polonsky earlier this morning in the Polish town of Zamość. Tall with a slender build, he's the president-elect of the Rotary Club of Ukraine Unity Passport. He and Hennadii Kroichyk, a member of the Rotary Club of Lviv and a past governor of District 2232 (which encompasses Ukraine and Belarus), rose at dawn to drive across the border to fetch me and Ed Zirkle, a professional photographer and a member of the Rotary Club of Columbus, Ohio.

Following the Russian invasion, the Ukrainian government prohibited most men up to age 60 from leaving the country, to make them available for military service. I ask Polonsky about his military status. "Not yet," he replies. "I'm helping my country in a different way." Equipped with a special pass, he and other Rotary members drive into Poland several times a month to collect food, medicine, clothing, and electric generators donated by Rotary clubs around the world; they arrange for the distribution of those necessities to hard-hit cities across Ukraine. Shortly before my visit, they traveled to Poland to pick up the second of two ambulances donated and driven from





stops us. "If the guards suspect you're with the media," he warns, "they could pull us aside for interrogation."

At the border checkpoint, Polonsky tells the officers that Zirkle and I are civilian volunteers from the United States. In a matter of minutes, two visa stamps are added to my passport.

The thought that we are about to enter a country at war has left me visibly tense during the journey, but that jittery feeling gives way to excitement at the border. I snap a photo of a big blue sign indicating the distances to Lviv and Kyiv, and text the photo to my friends in the U.S., along with a jubilant message: "I just entered Ukraine."

Wen Huang crosses Ukraine's border (left) after being picked up in Poland by Rotarians (above, from left) Hennadii Kroichyk and Vasyl Polonsky.

## FRIDAY, NOON, APPROACHING LVIV

"We're 67 kilometers away from my home city of Lviv," Polonsky declares. He slides on a pair of aviator sunglasses. "It's a great feeling to be home."

Ahead of us stretches an endless vista of lush green farmland. "If it wasn't for the road signs in Ukrainian, we could be driving through Ohio or Illinois," says Zirkle.

"We have black soil, very fertile," Kroichyk chimes in. "One can sow anything and it will grow."

"Ukraine is one of the world's breadbaskets," adds Polonsky. "Our grain is exported to Europe, Africa, and Asia." He says that Russian President Vladimir Putin has resurrected Stalin's tactics to destroy Ukraine as a free country by ruining its industries and agriculture while freezing and starving its people into submission.

The Lviv region has been the funnel through which millions of Ukrainians, mostly women, children, and older people, have escaped the country. At the time of my visit, that metropolis in western Ukraine has largely been spared massive Russian bombing and missile attacks, although more recent assaults on the city's energy grid are making for a grim winter.

Yet life seems normal on the rural approaches to Lviv. We pass farmhouses with red roofs and see farmers working the fields. Occasionally I spot the dome of a church. The peaceful scenery lulls me to sleep.

The car jolts to a stop. I wake up to find a soldier peering through the window. We are at a military checkpoint. Sandbags and concrete blocks partly barricade the road, and farther along there are metal anti-tank traps, called hedgehogs. They

Germany to Poland by members of the Rotary Club of Medford Sunrise, New Jersey. They also recently returned with a minibus packed with medical supplies from Rotarians in Finland.

"At a time like this, the Rotary network is truly amazing," says Kroichyk, who, until then, had been sitting quietly in the back of the car.

As we approach the Polish border, we pass a long line of trucks. Kroichyk says that the queue can extend as long as 2 or 3 miles, and drivers sometimes have to wait days to cross the frontier. Luckily, the line for passenger cars is short — the war has decimated tourism. Zirkle and I want to photograph our moment of entry, but Polonsky



are a stark reminder that we are in a war zone. My anxiety returns.

After being questioned, Polonsky rolls up the window and announces that we have arrived in Lviv. Once again, he cautions against taking photos of guarded bridges or checkpoints on our way to the hotel. People might suspect that we are *dyversanti* — saboteurs who try to alert the Russians to potential targets.

As we drive past a shopping center, I am surprised to see a new construction site with colorful billboards advertising a beautiful residential complex. Since the start of the war, Polonsky says that more than 150,000 displaced Ukrainians have settled in Lviv. The city is building apartments to accommodate them. “People try to keep life as normal as possible,” says Kroichyk.

## FRIDAY, 3 P.M., LVIV HOTEL

With its faux marble floor, the lobby of Lviv Hotel is a study in Soviet-era utilitarianism. But as I glance around, I spot a familiar banner near a clunky elevator door. In big purple letters it proclaims *Imagine Rotary*, the theme of RI President Jennifer Jones. It suddenly feels like I’m on home turf.

When you check into a hotel in another part of the world, you’re usually briefed on the location of the restaurants, the gym, and the bar. But here in Lviv, the serious young receptionist hands me directions to the bomb shelter. I have no idea how to respond.

My room has electricity, but warm water escapes the faucet grudgingly. I am nonetheless grateful after my long journey. An hour later, I join about 50 Rotary members packed into a small conference room on the hotel’s second floor. They have traveled here to participate in a district Rotary Foundation seminar. Mykola Stebljanko, publisher of Rotary’s regional magazine in Ukraine, is making a presentation. A week earlier, while I was vacationing in Berlin, Stebljanko had surprised me with an invitation to attend the seminar. I have been spending my holiday traveling eastward ever since, following directions from a cryptic caller with a British accent named Borys Bodnar.

During a break, that familiar accented voice sounds behind me. “Borys,” I blurt out and turn around. The mysterious man who had orchestrated each leg of my trip to Ukraine materializes as a towering figure with a handsome face. I ask about his British accent.

His parents, he explains, fled Ukraine during World War II and settled in the United Kingdom. Born in Leicester, he spent the better part of his life in London as a tax adviser and auditor with various financial institutions, but he came to Lviv four years ago. He started an office furniture export business and connected with Rotary to “get to know people and become involved in doing good works,” he says. In June 2020, Bodnar



“We welcome the refugees and offer them an opportunity to lead a normal life until the horror ends.”

— Borys Bodnar, Rotary Club of Ukraine Unity Passport

PHOTOGRAPH: ED ZIRKLE

### TOTAL FUNDING:

**\$14.5M**

Number of grants awarded:

**441**

Districts that sponsored a grant:

**274**

Countries and areas that sponsored a grant:

**55**

Countries and areas that benefited from a grant:

**29**

Number of multidistrict grants:

**27**

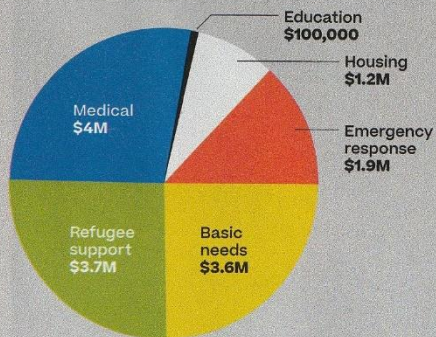


# ROTARY DISASTER RESPONSE GRANTS FOR UKRAINE

## COUNTRIES INVOLVED IN GRANTS

- Sponsored a grant
- Both sponsored and benefited from a grant

## PROJECT CATEGORIES



## LOCATION WHERE SUPPORT WAS PROVIDED



## ITEMS INCLUDED IN EACH CATEGORY

**INSIDE UKRAINE Medical:** equipment, services, medicine, medical supplies, first aid kits, mental health, wheelchairs, generators for hospitals

**Basic needs:** food, furniture, linens, mattresses, blankets, diapers, clothing, toiletries, clean water, basic medical supplies for home use, transportation

**Housing:** modular homes, temporary housing, generators (homes and shelters), renovations (homes and shelters) **Emergency response:** ambulances, equipment for ambulances, firetrucks, protective clothing for firefighters, fuel and generators for fire departments **Education:** school equipment, renovations, laptops, shelters for schools

**OUTSIDE UKRAINE Refugee support:** housing, transportation, food, clothing, medicine, language training, employment, hygiene kits, furniture, education support, legal assistance (obtaining visas)

All data as of 18 November 2022





PHOTOGRAPHS: WEN HUANG



became the charter president of the Rotary Club of Ukraine Unity Passport. "Within six weeks of organizing the club, we registered 35 members," he says. "We now have 37 members. People want to join us and help."

Bodnar says that, when the war began, Rotary members in Ukraine formed a crisis committee. One of their first priorities was to assist refugees fleeing cities under attack. "We welcome the refugees and offer them an opportunity to lead a normal life until the horror ends," Bodnar explains. "In very difficult circumstances, we help them cross the border as best we can to ensure that the Rotary network outside can help make them feel safe."

The war has disrupted Bodnar's business; for now, Rotary has become his 24/7 job. "I'm on call all the time, engaging with districts and clubs around the world," he says. "I also help organize logistics for donated supplies." The crisis committee ensures that those supplies, donated by Rotary clubs from across the globe, are distributed to the places where they are needed most.

Bodnar shows me a packet of water purification tablets. With the help of The Rotary Foundation, the Rotary Club of Ukraine Unity Passport and clubs in Great Britain, Ireland, and the United States have purchased the tablets for families in frontline regions where clean water sources have been destroyed. At the same time, Bodnar's club is working alongside Aquabox and Water Survival Box, charities founded by UK Rotary clubs, to obtain water filter kits for distribution in Ukraine.

A bearded young man joins our conversation. Two months ago, Sergii Fedotov joined the Rotary Club of Kharkiv New Level because he wanted to help. An optimist, he's already talking about rebuilding Ukraine after the war. Fedotov struggles to express himself in English. "By helping others," he says, "I feel that my soul is rising and my smiles are broader."

Iryna Ivanova, a member of Fedotov's club, shares her story. She and her husband, Hennadii, also a club member, fled Kharkiv in March with their four children after the Russians shelled their city. After a long and circuitous trip, they arrived in Dublin. Though her

family has found refuge with the Irish, Ivanova has not forgotten her home. At the Rotary seminar, she hopes to reconnect with her Rotary network to secure the essential supplies that the people of Kharkiv will need to survive the harsh winter.

Ivanova tells me proudly how the eight Rotary clubs in Kharkiv have established a large warehouse inside a Rotarian-managed shopping center. There club members receive, load, and distribute supplies donated by Rotary and various relief agencies in Europe and North America. More than 50 volunteers work daily to sort and distribute the donations. "Before the war, many people, including some Rotary members, probably didn't understand the power of Rotary," she says. "Now, when they see how Rotarians help people, they want to be part of Rotary."

## FRIDAY, 5 P.M., LVIV HOTEL

The air raid siren hits my eardrums with a blunt force. Momentarily panicked, I run back to my room. I grab my laptop, wallet, and phone charger and dash down the stairs to the lobby. It's empty.

Fumbling my way to the basement, I see four young people sitting on chairs in a circle, typing on their phones. Two older people are chatting in Ukrainian about something funny. Nobody appears scared. "Do you know where everyone is?" I ask in English. They stare at me, baffled.

I ascend to the street. People are casually going about their business. Back in the hotel lobby, I run into Iuliia Pavichenko, president of the Rotary Club of Kharkiv Nadiya. She explains that the Ukrainian word *nadiya* means "hope."

"Listen to the siren," I shout. "How can everyone be so calm and unafraid?" "It's a nationwide air alert, not specifically for Lviv," she says in her accented English. "We were scared [when the war began] and ran fast to the shelter. But we know that life has to go on and we have to fight the Russians. We cannot be afraid."

We settle on a couch. Pavichenko shows me a photo of her house, the ceiling damaged by bombing. She does not dwell on it. Instead, she is eager to tell me about a club project, dubbed Healthy Future of Ukraine, that provides psychological support for children and their families. "Ukrainian children have suffered tremendously during the war," she says. "Many have been forced to leave their homes, and their families are separated. Their fathers have joined the army, and their grandparents have fled to other cities. That's why we decided to help them."

In early October, her club, along with the Rotary clubs of Uzhgorod, Uzhgorod-Skala, Rakhiv-Center of Europe, Ivano-Frankivsk, and Rivne, connected with the Rotary Club of Rovaniemi Santa Claus in Finland to sponsor a Santa spectacular. A Santa Claus from Lapland dropped in on multiple Ukraine cities. Children, including orphans and those displaced from their homes, greeted him enthusiastically.

"We asked children to write letters to Santa about their dreams and to draw pictures of their dreams," Pavichenko explains. Scrolling through her iPad, she shows me photos of Santa with the children. "During Santa's visit, they presented their letters and drawings. It was a wonderful experience. It will stay in their memory for a long time."

In one city, Russian missiles sent Santa scurrying to a bomb shelter, but they didn't put a halt to his visits. "We are proud of our brave friend," says Pavichenko, "and we thank him for his Rotary service."

Iuliia Pavichenko shows me a photo of her house, the ceiling damaged by bombing. She does not dwell on it. Instead, she is eager to tell me about a club project.

Opposite page: In Lviv, photos of war orphans and fallen soldiers hang in a church; a street performer plucks a bandura.



## FRIDAY, 8:30 P.M., OLD TOWN

The medieval and Renaissance facades are dimly lit — a necessity given the city's shell-shocked power grid — and most of the windows are boarded up, but tonight the vast square in front of the Lviv National Opera theater is abuzz with activity. Mykola and Olga Stebljanko, married members of the Rotary E-Club of Ukraine, have taken me out to see the city's nightlife, and we're strolling through Old Town, the historic center of Lviv and part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site. A large crowd of youngsters are gathered around a street singer sharing a melancholy Ukrainian song about (as Olga explains) a mother mourning her son who died on the battlefield. About 50 feet away, college-age revelers hold hands and dance in a wide circle to a lively tune played by an acoustic guitarist.

"Everything seems so surreal and at the same time normal," I say, but before the Stebljankos can reply, I spot shocking evidence that nothing here is normal. On the side of the street sit several burned-out Russian tanks, their wheels warped and partly melted. A nearby sign indicates that they were destroyed in a battle on Kyiv's outskirts.

We slip into Saints Peter and Paul Garrison Church, a Baroque-style building where colorful murals adorn the vaulted ceiling. Since the church is now under the care of the military chaplains of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, people visit the building to hang photos of the war dead: Ukrainian soldiers, young and old, who only a year earlier had been farmers, merchants, or tradesmen. I catch my breath. Among the aisles are also photos of Ukrainian war orphans — children whose fathers have fallen in battle.

Beneath its soaring arches, two women dressed in black kneel in prayer. One is sobbing. I freeze in the presence of her pain. Numb, I walk slowly from the church trying to process the consequences of this war on innocent lives.

By the time we take our seats at a candlelit restaurant, we have only an hour before curfew. "When in Ukraine, one has to drink *horilka*," Mykola exclaims as he orders a colorful array of test tubes that contain different types of the Ukrainian vodka. "I need it," I reply, even though I seldom drink liquor.

Born in the Kharkiv region, Mykola, 49, grew up in Crimea. After its occupation by Russia in 2014, life there became difficult. "We could no longer talk freely in public places because someone might report us to the authorities," he says. "Russian intelligence officials tried to infiltrate my Rotary club." The dire situation prompted him and Olga to sell their house and move to Odesa in southwestern Ukraine.

Over the past year, as the war raged on, Mykola established himself as a conduit between Rotary members in Ukraine and Rotary International headquarters in the United States. I talk with him via video calls every week. He seldom mentions his personal situation, but one day when I press him, he says that Odesa was enduring constant rocket attacks and that Olga and their dog, Yurasik, sometimes had to huddle in the bathroom, the safest place in their apartment.

And yet, the couple keep their optimism. When I ask if he would consider leaving Ukraine, he replies, "No, this is my home, and I want to stay and help." He reminds me that his name, Mykola, a Ukrainian variant of Nicholas, means "victory of the people."

Olga offers a toast: "Victory of the people of Crimea and Ukraine."

## SATURDAY, 2 P.M., LVIV NATIONAL OPERA

We have returned to the opera house to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the founding of the Rotary Club of Lviv, though technically it's a celebration of the club's re-founding. Chartered in 1935, the club, the first in the city, was disbanded during World War II; today's club was readmitted in 1992.



Among the speakers is Vitalii Lesko, governor of District 2232. Lesko used to run a public relations company, but he showed up at the military recruitment office on the first day of the Russian invasion and stood in line for about six hours. "I had no military training and had never touched a weapon," he tells me, and he was turned away. The next morning, he was back in line before dawn; moved by his patriotism, the officers assigned him to a volunteer battalion of territorial defense of the Rivne region in northwestern Ukraine.

I also speak with Sergii Zavadskyi, another past governor of District 2232 and a member of the Rotary Club of Kyiv-City. He's eager to tell me what Rotary is doing in Moshchun, a once-picturesque village outside of Kyiv that was almost obliterated by Russian forces. At least 70 percent of its houses were damaged or destroyed, and many civilians were killed or injured.

Zavadskyi's club banded together with the Rotary Club of Ivano-Frankivsk





and the charitable organization UA Dream to establish the Moshchun recovery project. They were joined by the Rotary Club of Kyiv-Sophia and assisted by disaster response grants from The Rotary Foundation and contributions from Rotary clubs and districts in several other countries. Their objective: clear the debris from Moshchun and assemble 300 modular homes.

The first modular house was installed in June for Lyubov Topol, who lost her home and her only son when a bomb landed next to their house. Soon, more modular houses arrived for Topol's neighbors and other families in Moshchun. Flipping through the photos on his phone, Zavadskyi says, "We strive to revive this ancient village, providing local residents with a decent life, including walls, heat, and a roof over their heads."

### **SUNDAY, 6 A.M., FAREWELL**

It is still dark when Bodnar and Polonsky pick me up at Lviv Hotel to drive me to the Polish city of Rzeszów. From there I'll fly to Warsaw and then Berlin.

The previous afternoon, the two men had driven me through Lviv's cobblestone streets to a warehouse containing donated supplies from around the world. "Our Rotary network has enabled us to ship the supplies to frontline towns and cities that are difficult to access," Bodnar said. "We expect to fill the warehouse next week with a third donation of medical supplies from the German Rotary clubs of Ingelheim am Rhein and Mainz."

But, added Polonsky, "We'll need continued help from Rotary." I had no idea at the time, but the young man's mother had recently been diagnosed with cancer. She died shortly before Christmas.

The line at the Polish border is long. By the time a border control agent has thoroughly examined my passport and suitcase, it is already noon. In Rzeszów, before we say goodbye, Bodnar flashes the three-finger salute used during the days of the Ukrainian independence movement. And then he repeats the words spoken two months earlier by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy: "We used to say 'peace.' Now we say 'victory.'" ■

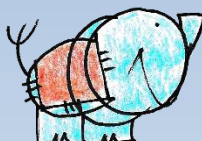
Clockwise from top left: Olga and Mykola Stebljanko distribute donated medicine in Odesa; Vasyl Polonsky loads supplies in Lviv; volunteers work at a warehouse in Kharkiv.



# From *The Spark* 2022



April 4, 2022. Frank Gunsallus, 6<sup>th</sup> from left, at a Warsaw City Rotary Club meeting.



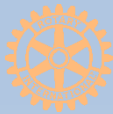
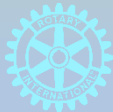




To your editor's eyes, one of the most endearing and powerful images to come out of the crisis in Ukraine is this photo of Young Joungh YUN, DG 2019-20 District 3750 in South Korea, distributing a yellow teddy bear to a Ukrainian refugee infant in Poland. Out of the darkness of war, these teddy bears brought light. Something so seemingly simple is the most meaningful of all. Rotary made that happen, or more accurately, a Rotarian made that happen. Rotarian **Robin Broomall of the Newark Morning Club** crafted 100 colorful teddy bears that were sent to a Rotary club in Warsaw, Poland, for distribution to children **forced to leave everything behind**. **Disaster Aid USA** did the packing and shipping. The bears took a while to make it through Polish customs, but they only did so with Frank Gunsallus' persistence. On May 31, 2022, along with a group of South Korean Rotarians, Frank distributed those teddy bears, and you'll see heartwarming photos of that effort on the next page. Robin is in the group photo on the page after that from the District Conference, second from left, and her brightly-colored teddy bears are a joy to behold! Robin is the essence of what makes Rotary work and an example to all of us that everyone can help.



# May 21, 2022 – **Teddy Bear Delivery** at a Refugee Camp in Poland



*Frank Gunsallus gives out  
Robin Broomall's teddy bears!*

*Young Joung YUN, DG 2019-20 District 3750 in South Korea  
distributes a yellow teddy bear to a Ukrainian refugee infant.*







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## COMMUNITY



PHOTO BY FRANK GUNSALLUS

The whole family is safe together in their cozy apartment in Warsaw, Poland. There are big questions about how long they will all be in Poland. From left it is Natalia, Iryna, Alla, Igor and Frank. When the sister, Alla, got a late night call from Frank about the Russian invasion, she knew it was time to help her parents make it to the border. He was in the states and saw the invasion before she did right in the heart of Kyiv. When can everybody go home? They are already making plans for sister Alla to apply to come to the states.

## Couple travels to Ukraine to save parents

 BY TOM MCCALL  
 tmccall@chasepub.com

EASTON — This is a family story of hope and devastation. Fleeing the Russians a mother recovering from cancer surgery takes a midnight train from the capital of Ukraine, Kyiv, to the Polish border to safety and an uncertain future. Her daughter is Easton resident Iryna Gunsallus, who traveled to Poland to facilitate her parents' escape from this war zone. Her husband Frank also left the comforts of the United States to help his wife.

The mass graves, the buildings brought to rubble and the majority of the women and children fleeing for the borders, marks

the current war story that is Ukraine.

"We never thought that anything like this would ever happen, because after the fall of the Soviet Union, Ukraine has always been peaceful. Even when warnings were coming from different countries, not a lot of people in Ukraine thought it was going to happen," Iryna said.

Frank has ideas as to why.

"It really looks like their goal is to create a land bridge to Crimea. It looks like they are trying to squeeze out Ukraine. You can see they are starting to drop bombs in Moldova and reach all the way over to Donetsk and Luhansk region which are the two contested regions," Frank said. "Putin wants to squeeze out Ukraine. What is

happening is genocide. People think genocide is just killing people like the Nazis did. That is one side of it, but it is also the erasing of a culture and the displacement of people. It is not systematic, but they are killing people."

Russian President Vladimir Putin has denied Ukraine's history and independence. The United Nations has confirmed at least 2,899 civilians killed in Russia's military attack on Ukraine, with estimates of 11 million people displaced from their homes. War crimes committed by Putin's army have been widely documented.

 See UKRAINE  
 Page 24

## HISTORY

## Maryland celebrates Tubman in state history

 BY KAITLYN LEVINSON  
 Capital News Service

CAMBRIDGE — Maryland is revising the history of Harriet Tubman following Republican Gov. Larry Hogan's decision to dedicate 2022 to the renowned Underground Railroad abolitionist, which many scholars say is an opportunity to inspire young people.

"When it comes to the education curriculum, African American history is still marginalized," said Chanel Compton, executive director of the Banneker-Douglass Museum in Annapolis. "It's just as integral as math and science, and we're really not there yet."

 See TUBMAN  
 Page 23

 KAITLYN LEVINSON/CAPITAL NEWS SERVICE VIA AP  
 Tubman portraits sit on display in the Harriet Tubman Museum and Educational Center, in Cambridge, April 8, 2022.

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## UKRAINE

From  
Page 1

"There are mass graves where they put 300 people in the same grave like in a town like Bucha. There are drones and you can't deny the pictures. If Putin takes what he wants in Ukraine he probably won't stop. He will go further and try to take more land," Iryna said.

Frank thinks it is more of a NATO-Russia conflict than a Russia-Ukraine conflict. Ukraine ends up being in the middle.

How did they first hear the war was on?

Frank said, "I actually knew before her. She was asleep and I had just finished working at 11 p.m. I had just gotten in bed and a friend texted me a YouTube video of Agenda Free TV. It is one guy but he has been covering it. He was like, 'It is happening.' So I texted [Iryna's sister], 'They are invading. Get out of the city now.' So I, in America, knew before she did."

"We told my sister to get out of Kyiv. Their main goal is to get to Kyiv," Iryna said.

Her sister Alla fled to their

parent's house 50 miles south of Kyiv. She took a train to the town of Bila Tserkva and its golden-domed churches. Their mother Natalia was there recovering in a hospital from a complicated cancer surgery. She had been through chemotherapy and had just had surgery. Three days later, on Feb. 27, Frank and Iryna flew to Warsaw. Her parents, uprooted by the war, took a train to the Polish border with Iryna's sister. While waiting for the train at 4 a.m., they could hear explosions nearby.

Finally they made it to the Polish border at a town called Zozin.

At this point many people were fleeing Kyiv. Traffic was terrible. After hours and hours, people began abandoning their cars and started walking to the border. Also the lines for \$7-a-gallon gas were really long.

"It is one thing when you are fighting for a paycheck. It is another when you are fighting for your existence. That is the resiliency of the Ukrainian people," Frank said.

On the 26, her parents Natalia and Igor sought shelter in their cellar. They could hear bombs in the distance

even in their remote home. "That's when we decided, 'We have got to go,'" Frank said. "We drove to New York and got on a flight. We told them either you meet us at the border or we are coming in to get you."

"I think us coming to Warsaw encouraged my family and helped them to understand this is serious. And her hospital told her, 'If you can walk, you should leave,'" Iryna said.

Of course getting through the border was not easy. There were long lines at Poland and Moldova's borders. But finally her parents emerged from the queue.

"It was pretty emotional. My mom didn't even seem shocked. She was in so much of her own situation that she didn't even feel like she was in danger or that something huge was happening. You could see it more in my sister. She was very shocked. She was crying. She couldn't really sleep at night," Iryna said.

They also spent a lot of time in refugee camps. The emotions were running high there on both sides of the Ukrainian border.

"I mean you could see despair, joy, rage. We saw it all. All at one time. You look



BY SALLY COVY

Iryna Gussal's sister Alla fled Kyiv when she was notified by Iryna's husband Frank that the Russian invasion was happening. She went 50 miles south to get her parents and they continued east to Luts'k and then to the border town of Zozin. From there they were met by Iryna and Frank and were taken to a rental apartment in Warsaw, Poland. All five still wait in the apartment.

over here and there is laughing and eating of food and over there it is screaming and pleading to get on the next bus. It felt weird walking around and taking pictures of people really going through it. But people need to know," Frank said.

Of course it is February in Ukraine, so it is very cold.

"There were a lot of children. I would say over 100 children like kindergarten to sixth grade. Old men like 18-60 were not allowed to leave the country. So whoever gets to the border is children, women and the elderly. We have seen a lot of sad videos of fathers saying goodbye to their kids and their wives. I have a friend with two kids. She left her husband. He was adamant for her to get as far away from Ukraine as possible. He stayed," she said.

Families separated, people running for the border, shells falling, and old Cold War dynamics taking form — what could be hopeful in all of this?

"On Facebook we found a place relatively quickly for her parents to stay. A Polish couple that is our age. They had just finished renovating. They let us have it for free. We had to really make them take our money for rent," he said.

"They were really helpful and also there are a lot of volunteers who bring food, clothes, children's toys and clothes and shoes," she said.

So now they are in a limbo waiting for news about her mom. They will not leave until she is in good shape. They want to bring her to the U.S. but she is not a citizen which makes getting immediate

health care difficult. And a long flight like that is tough given her health level.

There is another Eastern connection in this drama and that is the Rotary. Frank is a member.

"There are a lot of Rotary roots here doing projects. They are helping with refugee camps, getting medicines, helping transport people looking for residences. The major thing with the most potential positive impact is this daycare/mental health facility that we are working on with a Rotary group here. To work on people with PTSD," he said.

Frank and Iryna have also found coping skills. They are crammed in an apartment with her parents and sister. It is a long way from their home in Easton.

"It has definitely been helpful that we were able to keep our jobs. I am grateful that APG is letting me work from here. It helps to have kind of a distraction. Getting in to work and not thinking about this situation. I would love to go home where people understand me. Trying to navigate the Polish medical system in a foreign language has been difficult," Iryna said.

"Understatement of the century," Frank added.

There are things that the readers can do to help. There is a Youth and Community Fund through the Eastern Rotary. There is also Refugees International, Doctors Without Borders and United Help Ukraine.

"Rotary has bought an ambulance. We have bought body armor. They have sent tents, water filtration systems and lots of medical supplies.

Basically I can buy something of need, give the receipt and they reimburse me," said Frank.

"There is a website that my friend told me about. It was created by two Harvard students. It is called 'Take Shelter Ukraine.' Basically it is a site where Americans can go on and if they have a spare room, they could offer it for six months. I am actually trying to get sponsorship for my sister to come. There is also a government program to allow people to have a temporary humanitarian parole, which lasts for up to two years and allows citizens of Ukraine to work in the U.S.," she said.

"I think we are going to take it month by month. Some people are saying that Putin is trying to get victory by May 9 because it is Victory Day in Russia. May 9 was Victory Day over the Nazis. It has always been a huge military parade and a huge holiday in Russia," she said.

Frank looks at the whole problem economically.

"The Russian government is essentially mafia. It is how the KGB has been set up. The one rule is, 'Don't mess up the money.' That is what Putin is doing. So I imagine his friends are not too happy about that. There are pictures of him at a table and two guys are in his circle are still 50 feet away. He won't even let them get that close," he said.

For now they stay in Warsaw and eat pierogis and goulash until Iryna's mom is out of the woods health-wise. Beyond that, their plans remain up in the air. Will her parents ever be able to simply go home?



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# Residents from Easton are directly supporting Ukrainians

**BY FRANK & IRYNA GUNSALLUS**

**WARSAW, POAND** — Due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, my wife and I flew to Poland and drove to the Ukrainian border to meet our family at a refugee camp. We then drove them to Warsaw to obtain a stable situation and the medical care that Iryna's mother, Nataliia, needs. Nataliia had orthoscopic surgery on 2/22/22 in Kyiv, Ukraine and two days later the bombing began. The doctors at the facility came to her room and said, "if you can walk, then you should leave!"

Our friends fleeing the city picked her up from the facility and drove to a safe location where Iryna's father, Igor, was able to meet them.

While this was taking place, Iryna's younger sister, Alla, was actively escaping Kyiv; more specifically Obolon (a neighborhood in northern Kyiv), where severe fighting and bombing occurred during the initial invasion. Our family was able to reunite in their hometown, Bila Tserkva, before they headed to their "dacha," or country-home, an hour south of Kyiv. For a few days we begged them to get on a train to leave Ukraine and they were reluctant to leave the safety of the remote village. They were adamant that they were going to stay put, but we told them that we were on our way to the airport and that they could meet us at the border, or we will exfiltrate them.

What have we been up to?

Since the end of February, we have found numerous ways to assist Ukrainians; more specifically, refugees in Poland and those remaining in the warzone. This is in addition to our jobs, which our employers (APG Media of Chesapeake & BDK inc.) have been gracious enough to permit us to work remotely while we are here taking care of our family. With the support of our family and friends, Easton Rotary Club and Disaster Aid USA, Iryna and I have been sourcing supplies (medical, food and other humanitarian aid) to provide to the refugee camps or directly to people we know still in Ukraine. Their needs are constantly



evolving, but our ability to stay in communication with people there allows us to know what is needed. Now is the time to act!

You can help! Many people that I have spoken with in the United States ask, “how can I help?” or “tell me where to send money.” Well, here is what you can do:

**Contribute to the Rotary Club of Easton’s Youth and Community Fund.**

All funds donated here will be used exclusively for the benefit of Ukrainian children.

- Write a check to “The Youth and Community Fund” with a note in the memo section that should read, “Ukraine Aid – Frank & Iryna Gunsallus.”

- Mail the check to: The Youth and Community Fund, Attn: Peter M. Dietz, Treasurer, P.O. Box 2132, Easton, Maryland 21601

**Contribute to Disaster Aid USA.**

- Visit: [www.disasteraidusa.org](http://www.disasteraidusa.org)
- Tap / Click on the red button in the middle that reads, “Ukraine Relief – Donate Now.”
- If you prefer to send a check:
- Contact Bob Grill via email at: [bob.grill@disasteraidusa.org](mailto:bob.grill@disasteraidusa.org)
- Or call one of the numbers on their website for more information.

Thank you,  
Frank & Iryna Gunsallus

Дякую!

THANK YOU!





The Rotary Club of Easton, Maryland

1921—2021

A Century of Service to Others



In Poland, Frank Gunsallus, 4<sup>th</sup> from left, and the ambulance he secured for Ukraine

## *Frank Gunsallus, Easton Rotarian*

Heroes come along rarely, but when Frank Gunsallus and his wife, Iryna, traveled to Ukraine to get her parents out of the country at the beginning of the war, he became one in short order. Instead of running home, the whole family stayed in Warsaw, Poland, to help Ukrainian refugees in Poland and Ukrainians stuck at home and facing the horrors of a merciless and unprovoked war. Frank secured an ambulance to save lives at the front. He made sure a mental health facility was secured in Warsaw to accommodate refugees who had seen and experienced far too much. Working with Rotary Clubs in Poland and Ukraine and with Disaster Aid USA, he delivered tents, water purifications systems, lights, cell phone chargers, and much-needed food and supplies to where they were needed most. He delivered teddy bears made in our own Rotary District to refugee children, and they worked magic. He guided Rotarians from all over the world to refugee camps so they, too, could help. Like the firefighters and police who ran into buildings— and not away from them— on 9/11, Frank ran into the teeth of the Russian bear to help save his people. Frank is a true hero and sets a very high standard for the rest of us to follow. He's the very definition of Rotary's motto of "Service above Self."

This story appeared in the August 2022 issue of the *Tidewater Times*





Look at what **Frank Gunsallus** and District 7630 helped to start and will help to keep going. We are "People of Action!"

From Rotary Club Warszawa Fryderyk Chopin in Warsaw, Poland on August 1<sup>st</sup>: Our Center for Refugee Support and Education in Constantine is working constantly, and our psychologists had another class with children on Friday at the refugee center in Tomice.

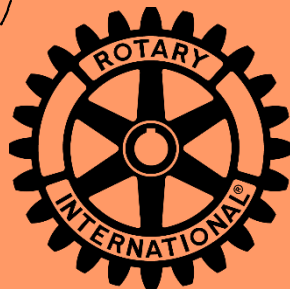
Do you see just how significant Frank Gunsallus' presence in Warsaw was? What incredible things he has done!





**46 & 40 = 86**

For 86 combined years, *Tim Kagan* & *Bruce Armistead* have shown the rest of us what service and the spirit of Rotary are all about. They are beacons, guiding our way on all the important paths of life. No two men could do more, no two men could be more worthy of our praise. Congratulations and thank you for everything! Happy Easton Rotary Anniversary!

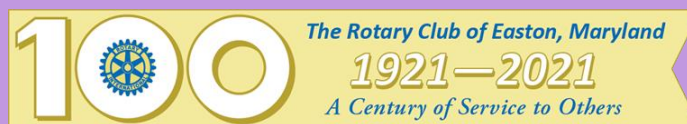






*September 2021 – John & Anne Farwell – Publishers of the Tidewater Times*

Make sure you read the ***Tidewater Times*** each month because it is truly a terrific publication. Few communities can boast of such a quality magazine, and it's made that way with love and hard work by Anne & John Farwell. Anne is an Easton Rotarian who has graciously and generously donated a full page each month to the Rotary Club of Easton. The previous page about Frank Gunsallus is what appeared in the August issue, and we are so grateful to Anne for this opportunity! Please thank her when you see her, email her at [info@tidewatertimes.com](mailto:info@tidewatertimes.com), or drop her a line at the Tidewater Times, P. O. Box 1141, Easton, MD 21601. This is a perfect example of a Rotarian yet again placing "Service above Self."



**IMAGINE  
ROTARY**



## March Meetings

- 02 – Bodey Richardson – Eagle Scout
- 09 – Board Meeting Report
- 16 – Rotary Foundation Report
- 23 – Amy Cawley – Maryland Food Bank
- 30 – TBD

## March Anniversaries

- 46 – Tim Kagan – 03/01/1977
- 40 – Bruce Armistead – 03/01/1983
- 14 – John Flohr – 03/04/2009
- 6 – Marilyn Neal – 03/16/2017
- 1 – Ryan Groll – 03/16/2017



Richie Wheatley & Tim Kagan

Each issue of *The Spark* is in honor of Past-President Richie Wheatley for his vision as President and for resuming this significant publication when it seemed as if it were lost forever.

## March Birthdays

- 01 Megan Cook
- 03 Mike Henry
- 03 Curry Wilford
- 06 Marvin Foster
- 09 Bill Snyder
- 10 Mike Kopen
- 10 Terri Charest
- 11 Buck Duncan
- 12 Cliff Coppersmith
- 14 David Wheeler
- 14 Karen Salmon
- 19 Scott Kane

## Invocation Leaders

- 02 – Lisa Felts
- 09 – Rosemary Fasolo
- 16 – Mike Hiner
- 23 – Jackie Wilson
- 30 – Brad Watts

## March Spouse Birthdays

- 21 Kim Hershey Hatcher

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- 01 Gary Yeatman/David Anthony/Brett Whitehead
- 03 David Lee/Richie Wheatley/Christine DuFour
- 06 Lonnie Green/Bob Grill/Albert Pritchett
- 08 Mike Henry/Abby Graves/Fran Jenkins
- 10 Mia Cranford/Megan Miller/Jed Anthony
- 13 Barc Upchurch/Brad Watts/John Flohr
- 15 Peter Dietz/Gary Yeatman/Megan Cook
- 17 Brett Whitehead/David Fike
- 20 Gary Yeatman/David Lee/Brett Whitehead
- 22 Buck Duncan/Marvin Foster/Kenny Miller
- 24 Mike Kopen/Dana Newman/Brett Whitehead
- 27 Liz Connelly/Steve Shearer/Brett Whitehead
- 29 Albert Pritchett/Megan Cook/Anne Farwell
- 31 Sherye Nickerson/John Flohr/Kenny Miller



*Spark* Editor  
George A. Hatcher, Jr.

THE ROTARY CLUB of Easton, MD  
P.O. Box 1444, Easton, MD 21601  
District No 7630 - Chartered 1921  
Meets Thursday at 12:15 P.M.  
Scossa Restaurant  
8 N. Washington Street, Easton, MD  
**2022-2023 Cub Officers**

President ..... Kelly Griffith  
President-Elect ..... Andrew Walsworth  
President-Elect Nominee ..... Sherye Nickerson  
Immediate Past President..... Reza Jafari  
Secretary ..... George Hatcher  
Assistant Secretary ..... Lori McDonald  
Treasurer ..... Abby Graves

### Directors

Club Service ..... Megan Miller  
Personnel Service ..... Megan Cook  
Community Service ..... Lonnie Green  
International Service ..... Connie Loveland  
Vocational Service ..... Casey Baynard  
Youth & Community Fund ..... Steve Shearer



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