

SUSTAINED SUPPORT

ALUMNI CONTINUE TO SUPPORT WAR-TORN UKRAINE

Nico Woods '12 had only lived in Kyiv, Ukraine, for a few weeks before Russia invaded in February 2022. In the immediate aftermath of the war, Woods helped connect those seeking to evacuate with private efforts to get people out of Ukraine. He delivered food to people who could not go outside.

As the war raged on, Woods worked to improve humanitarian aid supply chains. He also partnered

with a Ukrainian body armor manufacturer to restart their production with all products donated to the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine.

Since that initial scramble to assist Ukraine's people and military, Woods has become director of operations for the Ukrainian Freedom Fund (UFF). UFF is a nonprofit that has supported more than 200 requests from hot spots all over Ukraine. Among the items



The Ukrainian Freedom Fund has provided more than 100,000 pieces of body armor to the Ukrainian military free of charge since Russia's invasion.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF NICO WOODS '12

provided through January 2023 are, 150 drones, 20 cars, 40 tablets, 15 generators, 250 winter uniforms and surgical tools for an entire front-line operating room.

They've led renovation efforts on hospitals and promoted education and community outreach programs. Woods shared with *Shipmate* how some of UFF's efforts are positively impacting Ukrainians.

BRIX

Brix is UFF's first student in a 5-month long dog-training program focused on explosive and bomb detection. The Russo-Ukraine war has resulted in a significant number of casualties, and the use of explosive devices by both sides has become increasingly common.

Trained dogs can be instrumental in detecting explosives and bombs, helping to mitigate the impact of such devices, and saving lives. Additionally, the presence of trained dogs can serve as a deterrent, as their ability to detect explosives may dissuade aggressors from using them. By providing Ukraine with a reliable and effective method of detecting explosives, the dog training program can aid in the country's efforts to defend its borders and protect its citizens.

BODY ARMOR

At the onset of the full invasion, Ukraine needed more than 350,000 sets of body armor. Seeing an opportunity to help the Ukrainian military obtain personal protective equipment, Woods partnered with Lviv Defense Cluster (LDC), a Ukrainian non-governmental organization (NGO) that manufactures body armor.

LDC quickly moved from Kharkiv to Lviv and began building their operations from scratch. Woods saw the potential of this partnership and helped the Lviv Defense Cluster raise \$100,000 in the first month alone. With this initial funding, they were able to scale their operations and make significant contributions to the Ukrainian military. They have provided more than 100,000 pieces of body armor to the Ukrainian military free of charge.

CARS WITH SUPPLIES

UFF acquires sport utility vehicles, trucks and vans for use by Ukrainian citizens



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and defenders as ambulances and for the transport of critical supplies and aid between the front lines and logistics hubs in the West. UFF has provided dozens of vehicles to Ukraine.

This includes sprinter vans for the transport and deployment of humanitarian drones, refrigerated busses for the dignified transfer of fallen Ukrainians to their families for burial with honors, SUVs for the rapid deployment of humanitarian aid, replacement vehicles for those destroyed by Russian artillery and makeshift ambulances to deliver wounded Ukrainians to lifesaving care within the critical "golden hour" when chances of survival are highest.

TIRES

One of the Ukrainian Freedom Fund's recent initiatives was procuring off-road tires for an ambulance that plays a critical role in transporting civilians and defenders to points of medical care quickly. This ambulance is often required to navigate rough terrain, and the new off-road tires will significantly improve its ability to reach those in need of urgent medical attention.



The Ukrainian Freedom Fund provides off-road tires for an ambulance that plays a critical role in transporting civilians and defenders to points of medical care quickly.



The Ukrainian Freedom Fund provides cold-weather clothing to military members as part of its “Warm up Ukraine” campaign.



In December 2022, the Ukrainian Freedom Fund delivered critical resources to six cities within the Donetsk region including generators for a children's hospital and combat life saving bags to the Ukrainian military.

WARM UP UKRAINE

Kyiv's average low temperatures in October and November are 40 degrees F and 32 degrees F, respectively. From there, average lows drop sharply and do not increase above 30 degrees F until April. If not properly dressed and equipped, mild hypothermia sets in at these temperatures after around 30 minutes of exposure, severe hypothermia in under an hour and minimum survivable temperature in under 2 hours.

UFF is in constant close contact with Ukrainian citizens and defenders. The Ukrainian Freedom Fund has prioritized a new “Warm Up Ukraine” campaign from October to April with the goal of providing winter clothing and equipment to Ukraine. This includes hats, gloves, jackets, socks, boots, thermal underwear, Gore-Tex and multi-layer sleep systems, furnaces, generators and other critical aid.

FRONT-LINE AID

From 18 to 20 December 2022, the UFF team visited several cities within the Donetsk region: Pokrovsk, Myrnodar, Slavyansk, Svyatogirsk, Lyman and Kostiantynivka, which is 10 kilometers from Bakhmut.

Together with the paramedics of the training center of the main administration of the National Police in the Donetsk Region, UFF team members visited a children's hospital in honor of St. Nicolas Day in the city of Svyatogirsk and congratulated the children who lived in the occupation all this time.

The UFF team delivered:

- Two generators from Kolo Foundation to Kramatorsk Children Hospital.
- Mavic-3 and tablets to military unit 'A7039'.
- Four combat life saver bags and ten tactical scissors to military unit 'A4062'.
- 20 combat squad medical bags, 40 pairs of knee pads and 20 water canteens for the Pokrovsk National Police Training Center. 🇺🇦

A RETIREMENT I DIDN'T ENVISION

By Ken Shearer '77

When we last visited John Shmorhun '77, in the June 2022 *Shipmate* issue, he had volunteered as the director of Humanitarian Assistance for the Ukrainian Education Platform. Focusing on the biggest unmet need of housing for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), John and his wife, Tuscia, formed MoveUkraine along with a third partner, Andy Kuzich, in May of last year. Andy is a British Ukrainian, with a construction background, who has lived in Ukraine more than ten years.

The focus of MoveUkraine is assisting Ukrainians in re-building their homes, lives and communities amidst the destruction brought on by the war since Russia invaded in February 2022. At the core is rebuilding disused and damaged buildings to make homes for IDPs. Adjacent to that is building community and supporting Ukrainian business, as the nation rises from the rubble of bombs and missiles, while also acting as an “integrator” of other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) services to the communities of Ukraine.

MoveUkraine is building wonderful partnerships with groups like United Nations, Liev Schreiber's BlueCheck



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Ukraine, Ridgefield Responds, Norwegian Refugee Council, USAID, International Organization for Migration, Despro, Ethalon, People in Need and the local mayors and municipalities where they are working. This enables the charity to move quickly and efficiently to respond to the women, children, orphans and seniors in need.

I retired in March of 2022 after a 45-year career of military service and civilian work for large companies and small—predominantly in sales, marketing and consulting. As I envisioned slowing down a bit, the normal hobbies of travel, golf, cooking, wine and more time to read were on my mind. What I didn't anticipate was a dinner that John Shmorhun, my wife, Susan Leigh, and I had over the 4th of July weekend. For three hours, John shared the vision, mission, challenges and hopes that he, Tuscia and Andy were pursuing.

Many things impressed me that evening, but two stand out. First, the three founders all had every opportunity to leave Ukraine and live comfortably either in Switzerland or England, but decided to stay to help their adopted country not only survive, but thrive and rebuild. Second, all of the people involved are working completely as volunteers, including the three founders. Before the evening was done, with a nod from Susan, I told John that I wanted to be part of the team to help with marketing, communications and fundraising. It is one of the best calls I have ever made.

I was not alone in answering the call. Three months after joining with John and MoveUkraine, the Class of '77 held our 45th reunion in Annapolis. Two of our Classmates, Captain Craig W. Turley '77, USN (Ret.), and Thom McKee '77, with the support of Class President Captain John F. Vuolo '77, USN (Ret.), organized

John Shmorhun '77, his wife, Tuscia, and the Mayor of Mostyshche Andriy Nayida, cut the ribbon to officially open the new facility in Mostyshche in November 2022 that will house 29 children and caregivers, who have lost their homes during the war with Russia.



MoveUkraine renovated a 120-year-old school to provide homes for 29 women and children, including orphans, in Mostyshche.

FEATURE

a golf fundraising tournament. Nearly \$6,000 was raised directly or indirectly from that effort to support the charity. Wonderful support from so many in our class!

In nine action-filled months, MoveUkraine has already made a big impact. In our year-end report (<https://tinyurl.com/2kzog5gv>), we noted four projects were completed in 2022, with three more over 80 percent done. These retrofits of under-utilized or damaged buildings are now housing 200 children and their caregivers. MoveUkraine makes a difference for women, children and seniors, as most of the able-bodied men (and some patriotic women as well) are off fighting the war.

AMBITIOUS PLANS

One of the first projects in Mostyshche, provides a home for 29 women and children, some of them orphans and/or disabled. Orphaned children are a key focus as we move forward, and our “people network” identifies groups of kids that desperately need homes coming from the eastern and southern parts of Ukraine, closer to the war front.

MoveUkraine’s plans for 2023 are ambitious. But when you see the pictures and hear the stories of the senior citizen taking shelter in his chicken coop, because his home had been destroyed by Russian shells, there is great motivation. We will have finished the remaining three projects started in 2022 by the end of March. There are an additional 11 projects that have been identified.

Between these two blocks of work, an additional 1475 IDPs will have new homes. Thirty percent of these projects have received funding, and we continue to raise money for the remaining (approximately \$3.2 million more to be raised this year). The charity is only limited in the work that can be accomplished, by the investments it receives. The principals (John, Andy and Tuscia) have developed a network of craftsman, builders and manufacturing resources to drive the work forward, while at the same time encouraging the economic activity so vital to rebuilding the communities around these homes.



A new and exciting development/innovation that MoveUkraine is testing is called a Nest, which was developed by Eric Rasmussen and his network of engineers and professionals experienced in large scale disaster relief. The designer and architect of these units was Dan Keeney, senior director of engineering at Briotech Inc., and one of the cadre of volunteers Eric recruited.

Eric was one of the first volunteers to join the MoveUkraine team in the U.S., and brings his 25-plus year Navy experience as a medical doctor to the table, as well as post military involvement with numerous efforts around the world where natural disasters have struck. His charity, Applied Hope Foundation, provides the IRS approved 501c3 status in the U.S. for MoveUkraine. This Nest can be built in less than two weeks and house a small family in a warm and comfortable place. In addition to the support for IDPs, the Nest concept is also being adopted for use by the Ukrainian military.

Another component of the charity is aimed at assisting children. Kathleen Hessert (a communication innovator in the sports and entertainment industries who founded WeRGenZ, which provides insight from members of Generation Z to businesses, educators, researchers and media) is driving a program called KidsKonnnect Ukraine, which aims to build linkages between schools in Ukraine and the U.S. The objective is to support the children of Ukraine, existing in an environment that will change them forever, while providing a global perspective for U.S. students that they might not otherwise get to understand.

The Class of '77 has stepped up in a big way to support MoveUkraine. John Tuscia and the rest of the volunteers on the ground and around the world are an exemplary model of selfless leadership in action. We are always on the lookout for new teammates to join our effort and we welcome all Naval Academy classes to get involved. I can be reached at Ken@MoveUkraine.org if you want to know more about why being a part of MoveUkraine is the most important and impactful thing I have done in my life—supporting those in need. Slava Ukraini! 🇺🇦

MoveUkraine is testing Nests, which are homes that can be built in less than two weeks and house a small family.