

WHY CHERKASY?
WHY ROTARY?
June 1st
SANTA ROSA ROTARY

SLIDE #1: UKRAINE: WHY CHERKASY? WHY ROTARY?

TO WEAVE THE STORY OF HOW SEVERAL SONOMA COUNTY ROTARY CLUBS BECAME INVOLVED IN ASSISTING A 750 YEAR OLD UKRAINIAN CITY CALLED CHERKASY AND HOW THE COMBINED EFFORTS OF CHERKASY CENTRE ROTARY CLUB AND ROTARY INTERNATIONAL MAY ASSIST AND HELP SAVE 280,000 PEOPLE (+115,000 DISPLACED UKRAINIANS) IN SURVIVING THE RUSSIAN INVASION.

IT BEGAN, FOR ME, MEETING AND BEFRIENDING DEDICATED MEDICAL DOCTOR & HIS FAMILY AND THEIR QUEST TO DO GOOD FOR THEIR BELOVED HOMELAND.

My purpose this morning is to weave the story of how Sonoma County Rotary Clubs became involved in assisting a 750 year-old Ukrainian city called Cherkasy and how the combined efforts of the Cherkasy Centre Rotary Club and Rotary International may assist 280,000 people (and 115,000 displaced Ukrainians) in surviving the Russian Invasion.

Today reflects the importance of long-standing friendships and relationships and how, in the time of grievous human tragedy, like minded friends, countries and organizations do come together to aid the imperiled.

For me, the involvement with Cherkasy and the Cherkasy Centre Rotary Club started when I received a request from the daughters of a Ukrainian Medical Doctors, one of whom is considered a "Ukrainian Hero of Cherynobl" to facetime Drs. Leonid and Natasha Lashchenko and plead with them to leave the new war zone and come live in America with their daughters' families. In an emotional facetime conversation, outside their bomb shelter, they quietly yet firmly declared their intent to remain in service to the children and families to whom they had served for thirty-five years at the Ruska Polyana healthcare sanitarium just outside Cherkasy.

NEXT

SLIDE #2: A PEACEFUL SKY BY VALERIA, 11 YEARS OLD FROM KHARKIV:

I start with these thoughts from 11 year old Valeria from Kharkiv:

“We are from Kharkiv, but now live in Cherkasy region. Playing sports and drawing is what I love doing the most. With my drawing I wanted to show that the sky used to be clear and peaceful, that our people are strong and we all want peace. Please help us maintain a peaceful sky.”

NEXT

SLIDE #3: MAP: A RIVER (THE DNIEPER) RUNS THROUGH IT (RUSSIA, BELARUS THROUGH UKRAINE TO THE BLACK SEA NEAR ODESA):

To better illustrate Cherkasy's perilous location, here are relative distances between Cherkasy and cities already ravaged by the Russians. I provide relative distances between Santa Rosa and Healdsburg and familiar towns and locations to underscore how perilously close they are to the grinding war machine and to get a sense of how they must feel.

Distances from Cherkasy:

Kyviv	93 miles
Bucha	141 miles
Donbas	218 miles
Kharkiv	237 miles
Zaporizhzia	230 miles
Polish Border	237 miles

Distances from SR/Healdsburg:

Sacramento	97/105
Santa Cruz	129/144
Lake Tahoe	196/211
Reno	228/243
Reno to SE	228/243
Pre-war	6 ½ hours/now 3 ½ days

NEXT

SLIDE #4: CHERKASY 1998

APRIL 1998: PART OF SISTER CITY (SR/CHERKASSY) DELEGATION ON BEHALF OF SRJC TO EXPLORE FORMING A HIGHER EDUCATION EXCHANGE PROGRAM WITH CHERKASY STATE UNIVERSITY.

MUCH OF WHAT I EXPERIENCED WAS PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND A POLITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE IN DISREPAIR.

April, 1998, I was part of a delegation of the Santa Rosa/Cherkasy Sister City Program on a discovery mission on behalf of Santa Rosa Junior College to explore the possibility of forming an higher education exchange program with Cherkasy State University.

We were advised to expect an environment which was at least 50 years behind ours in infrastructure, amenities, engineering and architecture and it was. Independent from the old Soviet Union just 7 years, this fledgling democracy was in a state of disrepair both physically and politically.

NEXT

SLIDE # 5: BEFORE THE INVASION

THROUGH A COMBINATION OF INTERNATIONAL INVESTMENT AND GRITTY UKRAINIAN DETERMINATION, INFRASTRUCTURE & URBAN DEVELOPMENT HAD BEEN IMPRESSIVE DESPITE CONSTANT GOVERNMENTAL INFIGHTING BETWEEN CAPITALIST PRO-DEMOCRACY UKRAINIANS & PRO-AUTOCRACY (RUSSIAN) POLITICAL FORCES.

During the ensuing twenty-five years, through international financial investment and assistance the infrastructure and city development has been impressive despite the governmental infighting between pro-democracy (Ukraine) and pro-autocracy (Russia) political forces.

During this period, pro-democracy, pro-capitalist forces developed positive relationships with western countries and organizations. Foremost among them is Rotary International.

NEXT

SLIDE #6: CHERKASY NOW

WE HAVE ALL SEEN THE HORRIFIC IMAGES OF THE RUSSIAN ATROCITIES

THE ORANGY PHOTO IS OF A MISSILE ATTACK ON A FERTILIZER PLANT OUTSIDE CHERKASY. THE RUSSIANS ARE SEEKING PLANTS STEEPED IN AMMONIA, NITRATES AND OTHER VOLATILE CHEMICALS.

3 WEEKS AGO I WITNESSED LIVE, DURING A ZOOM MEETING, AN EARTHQUAKE LIKE SHAKING OF SEVERAL PARTICIPANT SCREENS. IT WAS THE RESULT OF TWO RUSSIAN MISSILES HITTING CHERKASY. ONE OF WHICH LANDED 1000 FEET FROM THE MODERATOR'S BOMB SHELTER.

**CHERKASY: HEAVY INCREASE OF INTERNAL UKRAINE REFUGEES
HUGE OUTFLOW OF CHERKASYNS FLEEING TO POLAND.**

Prior to the Russian Invasion, Cherkasy had made substantial progress in the development of its cultural, medical and financial resources; including infrastructure and attractiveness as a destination point. Most importantly, Cherkasy and the Ukraine made great strides toward the establishment of democracy, as evidenced by President Zelensky's governance.

The orange fireball is the result of a Russian Missile attack on Cherkasy's Oil and Fertilizer processing plant.

Cherkasy has been subjected to a series of bombing and shelling attacks though the most recent weapon of choice has been guided missiles. A recent Wall Street Journal Article identified Cherkasy as a prime target should the Russians refocus on Kyiv and other central Ukraine locations.

3 weeks ago while engaged in a zoom meeting with Cherkasy Centre Rotarians, Cherkasy was hit by two Russian guided missiles with one landing within 1000' of the moderator's bunker. They paused the meeting to check the damage and then apologized to me for ending the meeting early as they now had to ascertain any damage that occurred.

NEXT

SLIDE #7-9: THE LASHCHENKO FAMILY & THE RUSKA POLYANA

MET THIS SPLENDID FAMILY WHILE VISITING CHERKASY IN 1998.

**FAMILY: LEONID, MEDICAL DOCTOR & NATASHA, PEDIATRICIAN AND DAUGHTERS
LEANA AND KATYA (EKATARINA)**

**LEONID: AMONG 1ST MEDICAL RESPONDERS TO CHERYNOBL NUCLEAR PLANT
MELTDOWN 1986**

TEAM OF 20 DOCTORS W/NOTHING MORE THAN N95 MASK & MEDICAL BAG

WITHIN A FEW YEARS 15 *OF THE 20 WERE DEAD FROM RADIATION SICKNESS*

**HIS EXPERIENCE LED HIM TO ESTABLISH THE CHILDREN OF CHERYNOBL
SANITARIUM WHICH HE DIRECTED FOR 30 YEARS.**

**HONORED FOR HIS SERVICE BY THE PEOPLE OF UKRAINE & GOVTS AS "A
UKRAINIAN HERO OF CHERYNOBL"**

**LEANA, KATYA LIVED WITH US FOR 2 YEARS, ATTENDED SRJC AND THEN
OBTAINED THEIR MBAs. NOW US CITIZENS AND TRUE CAPITALISTS.**

**LEONID/SANITARIUM: HAVE SERVED THE HEALTH CARE NEEDS OF 3
GENERATIONS OF CHERYNOBL SURVIVORS.**

**ROTATES IN 2000 CHILDREN A YEAR ON 6 WEEK CYCLES TO BUILD THEIR
MEDICAL & NUTRITIONAL CYCLES TO RESIST RADIATION ILLNESS &
TUBERCULOSIS**

SERVED NEEDS OF OVER 50,000 YOUNG ENDANGERED UKRAINIAN CHILDREN

**BENEFICIARY OF US STATE DEPT/DEFENSE DEPT GRANTS AND BUILT AN
UPDATED MEDICAL WING.**

**LEONID'S ROTARIAN WORK HAS BENEFITED IN ROTARY INTERNATIONAL
GRANTS AND ASSISTANCE**

Leonid was among the first medical responders to the Cherynobl Nuclear Plant disaster in 1986. He was sent in with a team of twenty medical doctors with their medical bags and a simple N95 type face masks. Within a few years, 15 of his colleagues had died from radiation sickness.

That experience led him to establish RUSKA POLYANA or THE CHILDREN OF CHERYNOBL SANITARIUM which he has directed for thirty-five years. For his service at the Meltdown and THE CHILDREN OF CHERYNOBL SANITARIUM he has been honored by the Ukrainian people and government as a “Ukrainian Hero of Cherynobl”.

It rotated in approximately 2000 children per year, on six-week cycles to build up their medical and nutritional needs to resist the effects of radiation illness and tuberculosis.

Overtime, they have served the needs of 50,000 endangered children. Because of Leonid’s Rotarian Work, The Sanitarium has been the beneficiary of Rotary International grants and assistance including US State and Defense Department medical grants.

The Children of Cherynobol site (Ruska Polyana) had to close as the children needed to be reunited with their parents, many of whom fled Cherkasy to seek refuge in Poland and other NATO area peaceful settings.

Because of the closing and severe health issues, Leonid and Natasha escaped shortly after the facetime conversation I had with them, where they Their journey to safety, normally a 6 ½ hour drive to the Polish Border, devolved into a harrowing 3 ½ day adventure.

NEXT

SLIDE #10-13 W/VIDEO: CHERKASY ROTARY CENTRE & ROTARY INTERNATIONAL

LEONID LASHCHENKO: FOUNDING MEMBER & 2ND PRESIDENT OF CHERKASY CENTRE ROTARY CLUB #62578 AS PART OF BELARUS/UKRAINE DISTRICT #2232

CHERKASY CENTRE ROTARY FOUNDATION IS CONNECTED WITH SEVERAL ROTARY CLUBS THROUGHOUT NATO BASED EUROPEAN COUNTRIES.

Leonid Lashchenko was a founding member and second President of the Cherkasy Centre Rotary Club #62578 as part of Belarus & Ukraine District #2232.

Riven by guilt for leaving their treasured homeland patients, Leonid, and the Cherkasy Centre Rotary Club asked me to serve as the liaison between them and the now five clubs and three cities.

The Lashchenkos, working with the Cherkasy Centre have managed to fund raise \$31,500 for additional medicines and medical supplies Cherkasy Regional Hospital and the Ruska Polyana which is now a key refugee treatment center.

The Cherkasy Centre developed its war zone priorities and identified the need to develop 6,000 emergency 1st Aid kits for refugee children, families and civil defense volunteers within Cherkasy and Zaporizhzia.

Central to the 1st Aid kits are two quick wrapping tourniquets designed to treat upper body war traumas within 40 seconds and 25 seconds for lower body wounds. These kits include specific medicines, surgical bandages and utensils to help the lives of young children, families and volunteer defenders.

Utilizing international contracts and Ukrainian Rotary volunteers, the acquisition and assemblage of the 1st Aid Kits including medicines, surgical bandages and tourniquets cost \$24.50 each.

The 6,000 life-saving 1st Aid Kits will cost \$147,500.

Santa Rosa Rotary Clubs have raised \$81,000.00 (including a \$25k District Grant) to acquire and assemble and distribute 3,318 kits within the Cherkasy/Zaporizhzia war zone.

Our companion three Sonoma County Rotary Clubs have agreed to raise an additional \$65,000.00 to achieve our 6,000 life saving 1st Aid Kit Goal.

LEONID HERE

NEXT

SLIDE #14: FIRST AID FOR UKRAINE ART SALE TO BENEFIT CHERKASY & ZAPORIZHZIA 1ST AID PROJECT JULY 16TH FROM 2PM-5PM AT THE VILLAGE COURT IN MONTGOMERY VILLAGE

The medium will run the gamut from watercolor and acrylic paintings to pencil drawings, ceramics and photography. Several well-known Sonoma County Artist are providing their work. Several fledgling artists including students from Rincon Valley Middle School will present their works.

Some of the most powerful images are those created by Ukrainian Middle School Children who express hope, despair, shock and a child's plea for peace in their work and accompanying statement.

NEXT

SLIDE #15: 11 YEAR OLD VASILISA

“I am Vasilisa from Kharkiv. I am 11 years old. I enjoy gymnastics and acrobatics on a trampoline. On February 24th at 5 a.m. I was woken up by loud explosions. Outside my window I could see fire. I got very frightened and started to cry. My family had to leave our house on the 9th day of the war when the explosions got louder and louder and the planes were flying over our home. It was scary. When the war is over, I would like to come home, see my relatives and friends, hug them all. I hope no human being on this planet must live through a war.”

NEXT

SLIDE #16-19: 4 EMOTIONAL MEETINGS: COMMITMENT, COURAGE AND CANDOR

4 SPECIAL FACETIME/ZOOM MEETINGS WITH CHERKASY CENTRE ROTARIAN (3 WHO ARE SHOWN HERE)

MARCH 1ST: WITH LEONID/NATASHA---I PLEAD (ON BEHALF OF THEIR DAUGHTERS) FOR THEM TO COME TO USA FOR THEIR DAUGHTERS AND GRANDCHILDREN. POLITELY AND CALMLY SAID NO, DESPITE SEVERE HEALTH ISSUES, BECAUSE THEIR LIVES HAVE BEEN DEDICATED TO THE CHILDREN OF CHERYNOBL

MARCH 13TH: I SPEAK WITH OLEXANDER GORAH AND HE REITERATES 1ST AID KIT NEEDS AND HE INFORMS ME OF THE MISSILE ATTACK JUST HOURS BEFORE.

MARCH 16TH: I HAVE A ZOOM MEETING WITH 7 CHERKASY CENTRE ROTARIAN LEADERS INCLUDING THEIR TREASURER. GOOD PROUCTIVE MEETING REVOLVING AROUND PLANNING GOALS. TOWARDS THE END, THE 8 OF US HAVE ONE OF THE MOST EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCES I HAVE EVER EXPERIENCED---AS I BREAKDOWN PLEADING FOR THEM TO KEEP SAFE, THEY TOO BECOME POIGNANTLY PASSIONATE AS THEY REASURE ME---“CURT, WE WILL TRY AND KEEP OUR FAMILIES SAFE, PLEASE UNDERSTAND WE ARE DETERMINED, STRONG AND RESOURCEFUL. CURT WE WILL SURVIVE AND WIN” AS THEY, IN UNISON, RAISED THEIR CLENCHED FISTS IN SOLIDARITY AND PRAISE AND HAIL UKRAINA”

MARCH 30TH: DURING A ZOOM MEETING I AM INTRODUCED TO LUKEN, THE INCOMING PRESIDENT’S INFANT SON WHO HAD BEEN BORN SHORTLY BEFORE THE INVASION. HIS DAD WANTED ME TO MEET HIS BABY SO I COULD UNDERSTAND HOW THE UKRAINE WAS FIGHTING FOR THEIR CHILDREN, THEIR FAMILIES, THERE COUNTRY AND IMPORTANTLY, DEMOCRACY!

MAY 2ND: THE MISSILE ATTACK DURING ZOOM MEETING. AS ALL THEIR SCREENS SHOOK SIMULTANEOUSLY, I THOUGHT THEY WERE UNDERGOING AN EARTHQUAKE. TWO MISSLES HAND LANDED ON CHERKASY, ONE WITHIN 1,000’ OF THE MODERATOR’S (SASHA MUIIECHENKO) BASEMENT BOMB SHELTER. HE CALMLY ENDED THE MEETING, STATING “CURT, WE NEED TO END THIS MEETING AS WE HAVE IMPORTANT MATTERS TO ATTEND TO”

Since the Russian Invasion, I have had over 20 meetings with members of Cherkasy Center Rotary Club #62528.

On March 1st, I facetedimed Leonid and Natasha as they stood near their bomb shelter (where they had been living) near The Children of Cherynobl Sanitarium. After pleading with them (on their daughters' behalf) to flee to Poland and thence to the USA, they calmly reminded me that as medical doctors they were committed to their young patients and told me they would remain even with severe personal health issues.

March 13th, I spoke with Olexander Gorah about setting up a future zoom meeting to better ascertain their 1st Aid Kit needs. During the meeting Olex tells me that the missile had just hit the fertilizer plant and did severe damage.

March 16th, I spoke with 7 Cherkasy Centre Rotarians for about one hour to review needs and financial assistance via banks and suppliers. It ended with Hail A Determined Ukraine. It was one of the most emotional experiences of my life.

March 30th, Denys, the incoming Cherkasy Centre president, introduces me to his infant son, Luken, who had been born shortly before the invasion. His dad wanted me to meet his baby so I could understand how the Ukraine was fighting for their children, their families, their country and importantly, democracy.

May 2nd: During a zoom meeting discussing fundraising matters, all their screens start shaking violently. I thought they were undergoing an earthquake. Two Russian missiles had just hit Cherkasy, one within 1,000' of the moderator (Sasha Muiiechenko) basement bomb shelter. He calmly ended the meeting, stating, "Curt, we need to end this meeting as we have other important matters to attend."

#20: UKRAINE IS GRATEFUL TO SANTA ROSA ROTARIANS

NEXT

