

Our Cities Are Sisters: Vinnytsia, Ukraine and Boulder, Colorado

It was just last spring, after a few years in the making, that Boulder and Vinnytsia finalized this agreement. It is hard to know what it means, because it is easy for this to be a platonic gesture. But Ukraine has no time for any sympathies that do not lead to actual support. This is Vinnytsia's Friendship Statement to Boulder, please read:

DECLARATION OF A SHARED FUTURE

On the Occasion of the 250th Anniversary of the Independence of the United States of America

From Vinnytsia to Boulder

Every generation has its own way of affirming the value of freedom. Some win it. Others defend it.

The fortunate are able to use it to build the future.

Therefore, we, the community of the Ukrainian city of Vinnytsia, address the community of Boulder.

We hold these truths to be self-evident.

That freedom gives rise to responsibility.

Responsibility gives rise to trust.

And trust gives rise to communities capable of changing the world.

That independence is measured not only in years.

It is measured by openness to new knowledge, the courage to seek solutions, respect for every individual,

and responsibility toward future generations.

These are the very values for which Boulder is known.

A city where innovation goes hand in hand with care for nature.

Where education helps build the future.

Where freedom becomes a space for creativity, science, and civic engagement.

Today, Ukraine is fighting for the opportunity to shape its own future.

And we are grateful to all our American friends who demonstrate that freedom knows no national borders when it is upheld by people of goodwill.

Therefore, today we proclaim another declaration.

A declaration that cities can be closer than geography suggests.

That partnership is born of shared values.

That the future is built when communities learn from one another.

And that the friendship between Boulder and Vinnytsia is yet another testament to the truth that democracy begins with people.

May the next two hundred and fifty years in the history of freedom bring the world more cooperation than conflict, more discoveries than barriers, and more reasons to come together than to say goodbye.

With our sincerest wishes for peace, prosperity, and inspiration to the community of Boulder and to all the United States of America.



On behalf of Vinnytsia City Territorial Community

Mayor of Vinnytsia

Serhii Morhunov



People here know of Colorado. After asking my nationality they ask me what state, and when I say Colorado, they sometimes say "mountains" or even "Avalanche", ... but pretty much they know Colorado is "in the middle".

It feels good to tell them that we are now Sister Cities. I show them the website on my phone and they get it, and they often then say "kpyto!" (pronounced: kruto) meaning "cool!" or "Клас!" (like "class"! - they use it).

The Sister City project has been important to me. Douglas Gardner, who spearheaded the Sister City project, was the perfect person for this job. He had spent 4 years in Ukraine just after the fall of the soviet union as the UN Resident Coordinator. One of the projects he worked on was mitigating HIV/AIDS - so you know he had some guts, and a wholesome understanding of humanity. Currently he is the Director for the Highland Institute for the Advancement of Humanity, in Boulder. When he found out that I had gone to Kyiv last year and worked in rehabilitation services for Defenders, and that I was wanting to go to Vinnytsia this year doing the same work in support of the Sister City effort - he warmly welcomed me. It has been great for me to feel the support of infrastructure, and to have good leadership and the inspiration from being on a team.

Michael Brady, Boulder Rotary Club member and past President, current Board member for Frontier Horizon that provides a wide array of support services to orphaned Ukrainian youth, and founder of his business Generosity Wealth... and more... was who actually connected me to Rotary in Vinnytsia who then connected me with Pobratym! As soon as I had one clinic, I knew the rest would fall into place. Rotary Club has already had a huge influence in the Sister City effort - I will show you later in the post.

Andy Lenec, who is now my dear friend, a Ukrainian living in Colorado, a Sunflower Seeds Volunteer leading the solar panel project, and an ex-Peace Corps Volunteer in Ukraine - has been hosting English conversation classes with students from the Pedagogical University in Vinnytsia. Because Andy is who he is - his students have stayed with him for going on years now... over Zoom. They meet to talk about world problems, personal challenges, and day to day life. Through this project Andy somehow got connected with Yuliia Kashpruk (I need to get my details clear). But he connected me to Yuliia and she has been the keystone in the arch between our cities, and between me and Vinnytsia.

Yuliia Kashpruk, Юлія Кашпрук, is a member of the city council and is basically the functional lead on most things international for the city that requires any English. (I met a large swath of Vinnytsia's city leadership and... Yuliia holds the English!). And fortunately, she is a bright thinker, sees situations very clearly, understands American culture and Ukrainian culture and is a perfect bridge. She also gets things done. Just today, I needed police permission to be out during curfew on Friday getting to the bus station (for my bus leaving Vinnytsia). As soon as I told her, she was on the phone with the securities for the bridge I had to cross. Yuliia also has the deepest heart. She told me about a special Saint, and I understood something about this... just in the way she told me. Yuliia is a friend now too. We talk like friends. And I care about her a lot.



Before I came, I attended one of Andy's magical Zooms. And now while here in Vinnytsia, one of his group facilitators, a Professor Yuliia Hordienko, Юлія Гордієнко, (another Yuliia) - calls me and invites me to the Pedagogical University to be with her and Andy's students. I am super happy to go, because I have met some of these students on Zoom and I already know they are fabulous.

This is their University. Yuliia the professor races to greet me, and soon, also with a brisk step, comes Dima (aka Metro), Діма Матіюк, another professor I had met on Zoom. They first take me to a beautiful, rounded building.





This is the lobby to this round building. And it's hard to see, but it's a display of famous US historical figures... US history!!



It's just amazing to me how much the Ukrainians love America. They just do. They study our history, and our Constitution, the new generation is learning English, they know our system of government, our geography... They know us, and treat us like a good friend, and still do. And they know how to be a friend. It is just so disappointing how we are not reciprocating that friendship now.

They take me upstairs and show me an entire floor that is a museum of Ukrainian Culture. I have so many pictures, but I can only show a few. This design is to be painted on the front of your house. Everything represents something, and the bench is to welcome guests.





I am introduced to Rector Natalia Zamkova, Наталія Замкова, (in yellow) and Dean Olena Ihnatova, Олена Ігнатова. Rector Natalia says her mom has met me and "was impressed"... and I'm like... "who's your mom?", ... "and Vinnytsia has 500K people and how do I know your mom?" She said that I met her mom at Pyrohov Museum and tells me her name. It turns out I have a picture of her mom on my phone, and I proudly show

her. A fun moment! That's Yuliia on the right, and Metro in the white shirt.

Then, Yuliia and Metro take me to another building and have me lead the way into ... a classroom... and it's full of students! with questions! Super bright youth, full of promise, with such thoughtful questions. All in English. I spoke carefully and they understood. Ukraine, - you have a bright future if these are the people who you have coming up, your new leaders!



Andy, here's your students! In real life! They adore you and want me to make sure you know that. Over and over again they said your name.



The Vinnytsia Rotary Club has been a good resource for me. Svitlana Dmytrenko, also on Rotary, basically holds the whole of Hotel Zatyshok in her broad arms. Zatyshok is more than a hotel though ... it's a powerful hub - a mecca spot for the "boots on the ground" travelers in Vinnytsia. At Zatyshok I have met other Humanitarian Aid groups, an American who - as he says, "pulls triggers", an American missionary group, a Ukrainian marijuana grower in Washington State... I could go on. The place is interesting and people are very friendly.

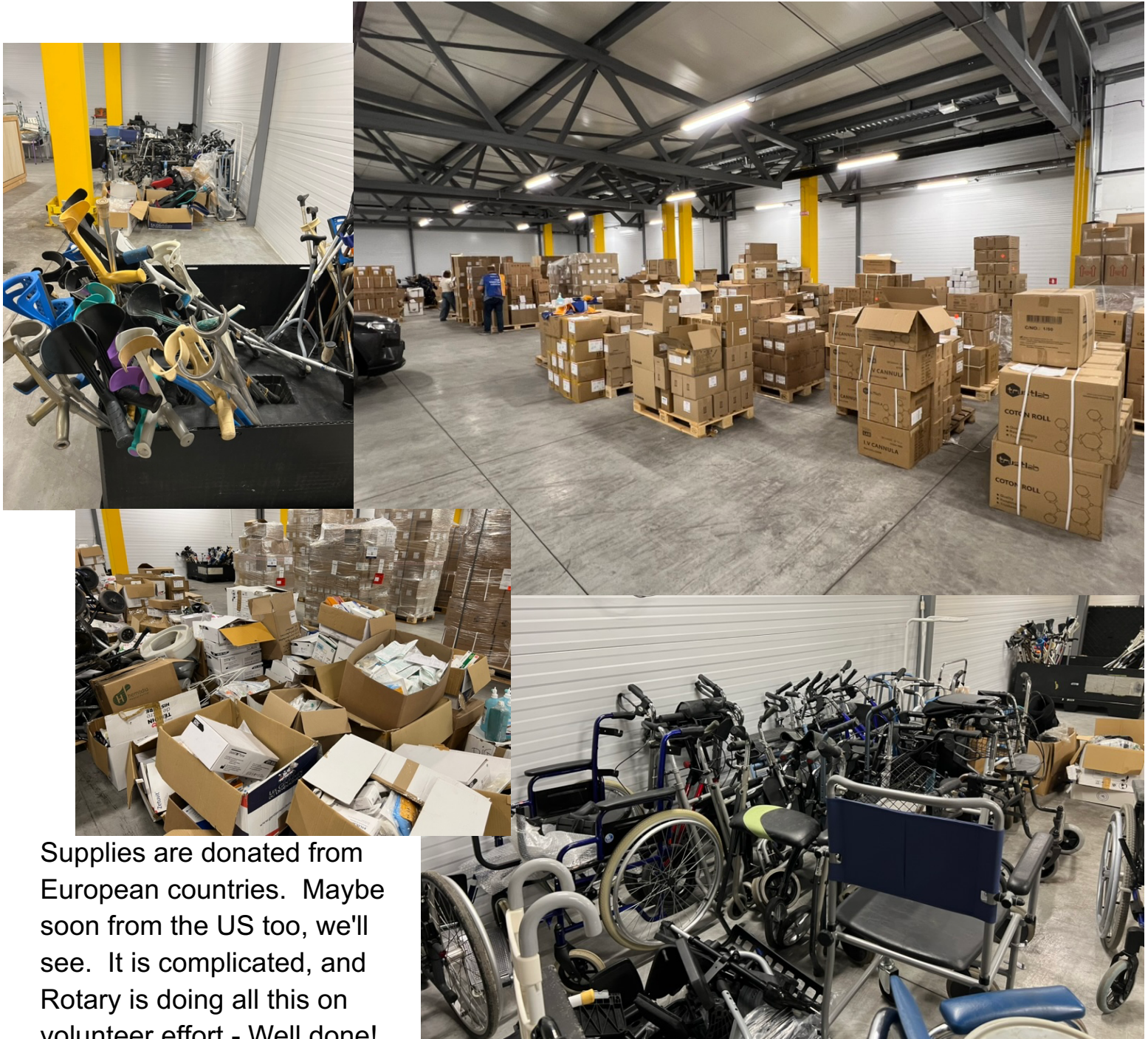


But one special guest that Svitlana introduced me to is Tamara Markelova, Тамара Маркелова, the Editor-in-Chief of Жінка magazine ("Woman"). It was explained to me that this is the only magazine still in "print" in Ukraine, and has been around since soviet times, with a readership of over 100K. Tamara lives in Kyiv and travels Ukraine collecting articles and networking. She asks if I would write something for the magazine... so I have to think, and I will try.

Rotary has also connected me with Andri (the President of Rotary), Андрій Гижко, his wife Olena, Олена Піщик, and their son Artem. Andri wants to take me to the playground that is being built from Boulder Rotary donations! And they have just broken ground! This playground is for special needs children at a psychiatric hospital. The hospital serves 17,000 children per year, has 566 beds within 18 separate departments. There is a playground here already, but this new playground will accommodate children that need more specialized supervision.



And on another day, Andri also takes me to the Rotary Club's huge warehouse. They receive and redistribute pallets and pallets of medical supplies. Vinnytsia Rotary should have some stats on this because it is impressive. I got to work for a few hours rummaging through these pallets looking for the right medicines to fill orders for a hospital. I was happy I could read Ukrainian! and was familiar with pharmaceuticals.



Supplies are donated from European countries. Maybe soon from the US too, we'll see. It is complicated, and Rotary is doing all this on volunteer effort - Well done!

Gaea Logan is a British American, Boulder based psychotherapist with a broad range of skills but particularly, for Ukraine, she is the U.S. Executive Director of the International Institute of Trauma Studies (IITS). IITS is a global, online immersive trauma training certification program, with an outpatient clinic initiated in response to the war. Gaea co-developed this robust trauma and resiliency training at the Pedagogical University in Vinnytsia - the same one that Andy's students study and teach at!

So, just two days later, I am back in this beautiful round building, but now with this amazing team of Mental Health Providers. At the lead is Olha Sergha, Ольга Серга, an MD, psychologist and psychotherapist, along with Tetyana Komar, Тетяна Комар, a PhD, Oksana Lyashch, Оксана Лящ, fondly known as Ksenia, and Alona Hactoyashcha, Алюна Настояща. I am warmly welcomed and excited to have met this team of highly skilled trauma therapists. The Sister City team back home has asked that I find as many ways as possible to support them, empower their work, and explore all the avenues for bringing this valuable resource to as many people as possible in Ukraine.

But first they have to take me to a painting. Kudos to Gaea Logan. Having your painting on the wall of this astounding institution has to rank pretty high on an already long list of accolades.



You can see how proud they are to be standing there, next to Gaea. Something very powerful has been built here... and with this war continuing to explode, this project will continue to blossom. First order is to get some rooms at the University refurbished... 3 more offices that will expand their capacity for



treatment. Clearly there is no shortage of patients, and the program has already trained over 4,000 clinicians so it will be helpful to get more treatment rooms available. The Sister City project in Boulder may well be able to step in right away. We can likely get it done. Next is to do some research within Vinnytsia as to where to get these treatment programs further implemented... and then into all of Ukraine.

Every person here is experiencing war related trauma. It is unavoidable when your neighborhoods are being bombed and your loved ones are dying. However, there is a type of resilience here that is palpable... but you can also feel where it's thin. It is a scary thought as so much rides on Ukraine surviving and being healthy. These scalable programs are extremely valuable for keeping Ukrainians whole.

And, amidst all this beauty and glory... just to remember where we are... This photo below is of an army unit basically recruiting donations from the public - yes the military is panhandling.

