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Star-Observer

Thursday, June 16, 2022 | hudsonstarobserver.com • riverfallsjournal.com • Serving Hudson, River Falls and New Richmond

\$2.00

INSIDE



The River Falls girls soccer team's 20-game unbeaten streak came to an end at the Division 2 sectional final. **Page B1**



The Kinnickinnic River was honored in a ceremony, featuring ancient rituals. **Page A8.**

OBITUARIES PAGE B7

- Susan C. Best
- Bruce Donelson
- David "Huey" Gillen
- Grace Guldan
- Howard A. LaVenture
- Bernard M. Lewis
- Virginia Lindquist
- Louis "Tommy" Lozano
- Marcella Lueck
- Trisha "Pat" Nehring
- Esther Christine Oesleby
- Eugene Peloquin
- Harold Pruitt
- Ronald "Ron" Rimer
- Barbara Slater
- E. Robert "Bob" Spinks
- Charles Traiser
- Dr. Paul R. Vandersteen



UKRAINIAN WAR



SAM FRISTED/STAR-OBSERVER

Tammy Smith and the Purtov family. From left, Smith, Nataliia, Mark and Andrii.

REFUGE *in* RIVER FALLS

'If we didn't get out we would be dead'

BY SAM FRISTED
Staff Writer

RIVER FALLS – It's the night of Feb 23 in Hostomel, Ukraine. Located in a northern suburb of Kiev, Andrii Purtov and his wife, Nataliia, are putting their 1½-year-old son, Mark, to bed. As the couple prepare for bed themselves they are unaware that when they wake up their lives will change forever.

Andrii is the first to wake in the morning. He senses something is wrong.

"I woke up to the sound of bomb shelter sirens, airplanes and distant explosions," Andrii recalls. "I'm like, 'This is actually happening.'"

War has broken out between Russia and Ukraine, ending weeks of tension and confirming international predictions of the imminent attack.

His life is quickly changing. He is about to embark on a journey that will lead him to River Falls. He just doesn't know it yet.

Andrii races around his apartment gathering his fam-

ily's belongings as Nataliia tends to Mark. Packing only the basic needs, Andrii knows there is not much time.

"I told Nataliia we don't have time to get Mark ready for the day, we have to leave now," Andrii said.

Russian soldiers have marched into Ukraine from the northern country of Belarus, 79 miles away. Both Andrii and Nataliia know if they do not move quickly they risk being trapped in Hostomel,

See Ukraine Page A9

COVID-19

Community leaders helped Hudson in early days

Bill Alms enlisted diverse group

BY HANNAH COYLE
Staff Writer

The ongoing story of COVID-19 started with more questions than answers.

COVID-19, unfortunately, has not left us, but the last two years have provided answers to some of those questions.

There were countless individuals who contributed to navigating the seemingly unnavigable virus in Hudson, and many of them participated in the Hudson Area COVID Task Force.

Task force

Alderman Bill Alms recalls Gov. Tony Evers' "stay-at-home" orders well.

On March 12, Evers declared a public health emergency.

It was a few weeks later that the "safer at home" order went into effect.

It became abundantly clear to Alms that there were a lot of questions and not many answers.

How does this virus spread? Who is it infecting? Can we protect ourselves?

See Covid-19 Page A6



Alms

WILDLIFE

Roaming bear visits Hudson

BY HANNAH COYLE
Staff Writer

Gerald Warnken's backyard could be mistaken for the great wilderness, with the variety of wildlife he's seen. Skunks, racoons, fawns, foxes, mallard ducks and on Tuesday, June 7, a black bear.

Warnken lives on 12th Street near Fillmore Street in Hudson, just around the bend from Hudson High School.

When he spotted the large animal, Warnken tried to scare it off before making his way into his home.

"It started growling like a mean dog," he said.

As it walked away, Warnken

grabbed one of his two cats taking it inside. He went to grab bear spray he had around from when he used to hunt.

Bear spray is an aerosol deterrent with irritative ingredients used to deter aggressive or charging bears.

It was around the lunch hour that the bear was making its rounds, and it came back to Warnken's property.

He used his bear spray, tried to protect his cats and grab a picture.

All remained safe, and Warnken put in a call to the Hudson police, who directed him to animal control.

The bear remains at large.

Readers can reach Hannah at hcoyle@ourourkemediagroup.com



PHOTO BY GERALD WARNKEN

Gerald Warnken spotted a black bear on his property near the high school, Tuesday, June 7.

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UKRAINE PAGE A1

becoming sitting ducks as Russians march into their city.

Taking backroads

The family jump into their car, fleeing their apartment complex. They head west toward Hungary, their only goal is to get as far from the bombings as possible.

Having to instantly flee your country is something no American probably will ever have to face. For the Purtovs's, it is now reality.

"The media kept saying, 'This will be the day of the invasion.' The day would pass, and they would set a new one," Andrii said. "They kept saying war is going to start, but they were always wrong."

Andrii takes back roads to avoid the log-jammed traffic. With thousands fleeing the Kyev metropolitan area, Andrii knows the bottlenecks are unavoidable.

"It was a huge risk because while there was no traffic we risked running into invading Russian forces," he said. "If we would have been caught we would have been killed."

Andrii navigates using news reports about the most plausible Russian invasion locations. The backroads lead the family through the western Ukraine countryside. Open plains turn to forests. It would make for a calm, scenic drive if not for the panic an ongoing invasion causes.

"I told myself, 'I hope there are no tanks in the forest,'" Andrii recalls.

The family makes it to the Hungary border after a day of driving. They present the necessary paperwork. They cross into the refuge of Hungary as the sun sets below the horizon.

The next goal was getting to Romania, 130 miles away. They had already traveled 500 miles. Andrii contacted an old friend who would give them a place to live and help them look for work if they could make it to Romania.

The next day the family is back on the road heading south to Romania. As they cross into Romania they run into some luck.

"As we are driving into the country we notice a large group of people supplying aid," Andrii said. "We were able to get food, diapers for Mark and other supplies. They also gave us updates on the Russian offensive."

The Purtovs would make it to their friend's house to plan their next moves. The plan was for Andrii to stay to find work, hoping the family could return to Ukraine when it was safe. The family stayed in Romania for two months. Their hope was to return to their home but as they days wore on that looked less of a possibility.

'Wanted to help'

Enter Tammy Smith of River Falls.

Smith was involved with Ukrainian refugee Facebook groups. She said Andrii and Nataliia reached out asking about refugee residency.

"I saw what was going on over there, and I just wanted to help," Smith said.

The Ukrainian family and the American began exchanging information. Both feared a scam.

"I wanted to make sure they were not trying to pull a scam. I began to ask them specific questions to ensure they didn't have a fake story," Smith said.

Andrii admitted the same thing, asking specific questions to ensure his family would not be scammed. Eventually the two set up a Facetime session. It was the first time Smith saw Andrii and Nataliia's faces.

"I knew they were genuine when I saw their faces and heard their stories," Smith said.

Smith began to research a way to get the family to the U.S. Smith and the Purtovs signed up for the "United for Ukraine Program." The program allows qualified Ukrainian refugees to legally enter the United States and stay with a host family for two years.

Smith said it took about three weeks for the paperwork to be approved. Andrii said Nataliia was hesitant to come to the U.S.

"She was nervous because she has never been to that part of the world before. Eventually I convinced her to go because that was the best option we had," Andrii said.

This would not be Andrii's first trip to the United States. He had worked on cruise ships that sailed into ports in Florida a few years earlier.

Being around vacationing Americans he learned to speak English well. His language ability caught Smith off guard when they first spoke.

Andrii said the family researched River Falls to determine if they would enjoy living there. They agreed it would be a good place because of its proximity to Minneapolis. He said he wanted to keep the family in an urban setting similar to Hostomel.

That town was no longer a home for them.

Devastation

Preparing for the trip to River Falls, they heard about the devastation of the place they called home. A video from a family member of their old apartment showed broken windows and debris littering the complex. The video shows vandalized cars and the aftermath of the invasion.

One photo is especially haunting. The photo shows a yellow chair outside the complex with a metal container underneath it. Written on the chair in Russian: "If you sit here you will be blown up."

The city was a frontline for the invasion. The Russians broke through, marching into Hostomel the day after the family fled.

"If we didn't get out that day we would have been dead. I would not be here today," Andrii said.

Andrii stays in contact with his family. He said both his and Nataliia's family are safe. Their close friends are safe, too, he added.

Friends told of the ruthlessness of the Russians soldiers. One lady who stayed at the apartment was captured, shot and buried in the yard.

"They call us Nazis but they come into our country and kill. It makes no sense," he said, his voice cracking.

The Purtovs touched down in Minneapolis at the end of May. Smith was at the airport, welcoming the family to the country. It was "a dream" when Smith first met the family.

Andrii said the River Falls community has been "wonderful" since they arrived. For the family, the host has exceeded expectations.

"Tammy is our angel," Andrii said with a smile.

Community support

As the Purtovs settle in, Andrii said community members have been extremely supportive and helpful. River Falls has only been home for two weeks, but the support has led the family to consider making a permanent move once the two years are completed.

"I want to stay in River Falls," Nataliia said, smiling at the thought of establishing a long-term residence.

The next steps for the family involve getting work authorization. Andrii said he is here to work, he's not just here to visit.

"We want to work in a community that has helped us out so much. Our way of giving back is working in the community," he said.

The family have made a few trips to Eau Claire so Andrii and Nataliia can apply for work authorization. They have applied for Social Security numbers.

To help with the life-changing transition, Smith has set up a GoFundMe to raise money for Andrii, Nataliia and Mark. The fundraiser has raised more than \$5,000.

Smith has connected with other families in the area who expressed interest in taking in Ukrainian refugees. One of those families lives in Hudson. As someone who recently completed the process, Andrii has been helping Smith and the family.

"I think families should help. It's what I did and now I don't want them to leave. I love having them," Smith said.

While returning to Ukraine would be the dream situation,



PHOTO COURTESY OF TAMMY SMITH

Since arriving, the Purtovs have been spending their time catching up on sleep, adjusting to the time zone difference and getting used to their new life. From left, Smith, Andrii and Nataliia.



PHOTO COURTESY OF TAMMY SMITH

Smith greets Andrii with a hug at the Minneapolis/St. Paul Airport. The Purtovs arrived at the end of May.

Andrii said he doesn't know if that will be possible. Andrii said there are too many factors to consider before they can return home.

For now, River Falls is home,

and he isn't complaining. "We love it here. This has been more than what we expected," Andrii said.

Readers can reach Sam at sfristed@ourourkemediagroup.com



PHOTO COURTESY OF ANDRII PURTOV

The front entrance to the apartment is covered with debris. The family made it out the day before Russian soldiers marched into the city.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ANDRII PURTOV

Broken windows and debris from the complex show the aftermath of the Russian invasion into the city.