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# Ashland Daily Press

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## Escaping from Russia, with love

Washburn family welcomes war refugees

BY **PETER J. WASSON**  
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*Editor's note: Portions of the interviews for this story were conducted using a translation application; most of Sasha Melnyk's quotes are approximations as transcribed by that app.*

The bombs and missiles began slamming into Sasha Melnyk's neighborhood in central Ukraine early in spring.

The government had warned her that the Russians were coming. For weeks, she had kept a suitcase packed and the car gassed up, ready to flee in case the Russian army made it all the way to her city of Kirovohrad.

But Sasha, 36, wasn't ready to give up the home and six acres of land she owned. So she stuck it out for weeks, going to work every day as a manager in a company that sold wood products near Odessa. She and coworkers hid in a basement at work when the bombs came, then emerged and went back to work — until the war became so intense that the orders stopped coming in and the work ended.

But then, four months went by with no bombs, no missiles. Melnyk allowed herself to hope the worst was over, that the conflict might be resolved.

"We calmed down a bit," she said. "But then, one fine day in the forest, rockets flew again. I began to realize we had to go somewhere else because there was no safe place. There was nowhere safe in Ukraine."

Sasha and her 5-year-old daughter Anya were forced to flee the only home they ever knew. They spoke almost no English and carried only what they could fit in one suitcase.

They landed, improbably, in the home of a couple they



**With bombs and missiles slamming into their neighborhood in Ukraine, Sasha Melnyk fled the only home she had ever known with her daughter, Anya, 5. They ended up 5,000 miles away, living with Don and Jodie Karr near Washburn under the government's Uniting for Ukraine program that grants refugees two years of "probation" in the U.S. (Contributed photo)**

had never met in a place they had never heard of, thousands of miles away from Ukraine — Washburn, Wisconsin.

**Offering refuge**

Don and Jodie Karr had never done anything like it before.

Their journey began when one of Don's coworkers at Columbia Forest Products in Mellen, Eric Magnuson, told him about sponsoring a Ukrainian family trying to escape the war. Don started looking on social media at all the refugees seeking safe places to live; his heart was particularly touched by all the moms with young kids who were running for their lives as their husbands and sons joined the fighting.

"We're recent empty-nesters and we had room available," Don Karr said. "And we thought, if we can help someone, we should."

The couple — Jodie

**More Information**

Learn more about the Uniting for Ukraine program and how to sponsor refugees at [uscis.gov/ukraine](https://uscis.gov/ukraine). The Karrs also are willing to answer questions or give presentations on the process; message them at [Karrs6173@gmail.com](mailto:Karrs6173@gmail.com)

teaches health sciences at Northwood Technical College — applied for the federal government's Uniting for Ukraine project, President Joe Biden's program that allows Ukrainians with sponsors to stay in the U.S. for two years. Their sponsors must commit to financially supporting what the government refers to as their "beneficiaries," providing them with safe housing and needed medical care, helping them learn English and getting their kids enrolled in local schools.

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## Bringing them here

Sponsoring a Ukrainian family, in his own words

BY **ERIC MAGNUSON**,  
For the Ashland Daily Press

I first started seeing families on Facebook trying to flee Ukraine during the week of May 23. Most were families with young children looking to go somewhere to have a safe place to raise their kids. The families were all types. Mothers with children; college-age kids; both parents with kids; sometimes families with extended family like grandma and grandpa.

The more I looked into it the more I realized that a tremendous need there was for relocating these people. All their stories had one thing in common: They were fleeing Ukraine because their



**Eric and Linda Magnuson have blended their family with their sponsees' and have introduced them to life in the Midwest. (Contributed photo)**

lives there had ended. Their jobs were gone, their security was gone, and in many cases their homes were gone.

On May 27 my wife Linda and I discussed the possibility of us hosting a family at our home. She was for it, although she was cautious

— as should be anyone who welcomes people into their homes to live with them. It's not just us in this house, it's our kids, too, and as parents our children's safety is paramount.

SEE SPONSOR • PAGE A4

## Bayfield County seeks opinions on opioid money

BY **RICK OLIVO**  
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Bayfield County residents will have a say in how the county uses more than \$200,000 from a multi-state lawsuit settlement with drug manufacturers over their responsibility for the opioid crisis that has gripped America in recent years.

The county can take either a lump sum of \$206,684 or payments of about \$12,000 for over 16 years, county Administrator Mark Abeles Allison said. Counties are incentivized to take the lump sum payment.

"One of the discussion topics is that, will these companies be in place in 10 or 12 or 15 years? That is why people are looking at the one-time payout," he said.

Bayfield County Director of Human Services Elizabeth Skulan said the county will use an online survey to help determine how the funds should be used.

"The three primary ways we can use the money are prevention, intervention and treatment," she said. "There are a lot of subcategories under that, but we are really hoping to identify what the community feels are gaps right now. It's not a lot of money, so we want to invest it wisely."

Skulan said the county wants to make an impact in prevention and intervention because money spent in those areas can be stretched farther than paying for expensive drug treatment.

Whatever the amount the county receives from the settlement, it won't come close to covering the costs the county has borne in recent years because of the opioid epidemic, Skulan said.

Bayfield County Health Officer Sara Wartman said the county could take its time to decide how to use the funds

"We were encouraged by the state to do an assessment of the community, to get the community's input on how it should be used," she said. "We are looking for everyone's input — tribal input, rural health input, marginalized populations."

Wartman said she was partial to prevention-based programs focused on youth.

"That has the largest return on investment," she said. "You can use it for treatment and diversion programs, you can use it for Narcan, you can use it for education, youth-based programming, a lot of things."

Spending it for treatment could run through the money in a hurry, Wartman said.

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Wartman

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