

THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

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Spokane, Washington

UKRAINIAN FAMILY THAT FLED MARIUPOL NOW ADJUSTS TO LIFE IN SPOKANE HOTEL



PHOTOS BY KATHY PLONKA/THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

With their youngest son, Habriel, 1, by their side, Mykhailo Kurilova comforts his wife, Anna, as she describes the harrowing experience of fleeing their home in Ukraine during the Russian invasion. They are now living at the Thrive Center, a formerly vacant hotel used to house Ukrainian refugees, shown July 11 in Spokane.

'WE WEREN'T RICH, BUT WE HAD EVERYTHING'



Ukrainian refugee Anna Kurilova says she uses her phone to stay informed about the war while living at the Thrive Center.

MORE INSIDE

2,500 UKRAINIANS HAVE ARRIVED SINCE WAR BEGAN THIS YEAR

Refugees continue to pour into the Spokane area, where the Slavic community welcomes them. **NEWS, 10**

MORE ONLINE

RUSSIAN TRANSLATION OF THE KURILOVAS' STORY FOUND ONLINE

Читайте русский перевод этой истории онлайн
SPOKESMAN.COM/NEWS

By Emma Epperly
THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

A small house nestled a few blocks from the sea with a workshop out back. Two young children running around, keeping their parents blissfully exhausted. Family nearby to help out in times of need and share in moments of joy. The Kurilovas had everything that mattered.

Then Russia invaded Ukraine. The Kurilovas now live in a Spokane hotel where a bathroom serves as a makeshift kitchen, a dresser as a pantry and a corner near the bed acts as a playroom.

Anna and Mykhailo Kurilova wake up each day and think, "What are we going to do?"

They're in a strange country in a city where they knew no one just months ago, trying to navigate daily life in a new language, all while worrying about their homeland and grieving the life they lost.

"We weren't rich, but we had everything," Anna, 30, said with tears in her eyes. The Kurilovas are among more than 3.5 million refugees who have fled Ukraine in

See **UKRAINE, 8**

'WAY OUT OF BUDGET': HIGH-PRICED TOYS BRING CHALLENGES THIS YEAR FOR CHRISTMAS BUREAU

Organizers also see delay in toy deliveries due to manufacturing issues, back-orders, availability



CHRISTMAS FUND • 2022

By Nina Culver
FOR THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

Buying toys for the Christmas Bureau is a year-round job, and this year was no different. But one thing that changed this year was how long the toys took to show up after being ordered, if they showed up at all.

Some toys ordered in January and February didn't arrive until September and October, head toy buyer

Cheryl Taam said. While that allowed organizers to save money on storage fees, the timing was tight.

"A lot of things are back-ordered," Taam said. "We weren't sure we were going to get it. We were keeping our fingers crossed quite a bit, because I didn't want to have to start looking for things in October."

The Christmas Bureau, in its 77th

See **BUREAU, 14**



KATHY PLONKA/THE S-R

Volunteer Damon Taam laughs as he adds batteries to a toy dinosaur for the Christmas Bureau last year.

Local legislators push to protect kids online

McMorris Rodgers, Cantwell work to rein in 'Big Tech'

By Orion Donovan-Smith
THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

WASHINGTON – A year-end push to pass bipartisan legislation aimed at protecting children online illustrates the vexing challenge Congress faces in regulating social media platforms – and offers a preview of the power two Washington lawmakers could have to rein in "Big Tech" next year.

MORE INSIDE
FARMWORKER PROTECTIONS

Newhouse urges fellow GOPers to get behind bill aimed at giving ag industry a legal workforce while fixing part of dysfunctional immigration system.

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Advocates of the Kids Online Safety Act, which would require platforms to shield users under 17 from harmful content and default to strict privacy settings, headed to Capitol Hill

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ED HUMES TAKES ON NEXT ADVENTURE

FURTHER REVIEW:

Looking back at Ed Humes' 15 books ahead of Tuesday's release of deep dive into DNA cold case.

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BOOK REVIEW: In "Forever Witness," Northwest Passages-featured author finds intersection of crime, science and humanity.

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FROM MARIUPOL

Mykhailo Kurilova and his wife, Anna, fill out documents for Temporary Protected Status on Aug. 2 while staying at the Thrive Center.



Mykhailo Kurilova loads his son Habriel, 1, into their borrowed van along with 6-year-old Yelysei and his wife, Anna, on July 11 outside the Thrive Center.



Ukrainian refugee Mykhailo Kurilova holds his youngest son, Habriel, 1, as his wife, Anna, takes advantage of the food bank at Spokane Community College on July 11.



Six-year-old Ukrainian refugee Yelysei Kurilova plays in the fountain in front of the Thomas S. Foley U.S. Courthouse on Aug. 2 in downtown Spokane.



PHOTOS BY KATHY PLONKA/THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

Ukrainian refugees Mykhailo Kurilova and his wife, Anna, drive past an American flag Aug. 2 in Spokane. They fled Ukraine during the Russian invasion with their two children and are now living at the Thrive Center, a formerly vacant hotel that is now used to house Ukrainian refugees in Spokane.

UKRAINE

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recent months. More than 100,000 Ukrainians have arrived in the United States as part of the country's Uniting for Ukraine program that allows American citizens to sponsor refugees. The Kurilovas are among more than 10,000 people who came to Washington as part of the program.

Despite finding a safe place to settle, the future remains unclear for the couple. The kids are struggling to adjust to Spokane's climate while battling persistent runny noses and frequent fevers. Anna misses the sea breeze. Communicating with those around them is a constant struggle. And watching the war back home is heartbreaking.

So for now, they wait, make the best of each day, and don't plan for the future.

The invasion

It was love at first sight when Mykhailo spotted the sweet and smiley 18-year-old Anna on spring break more than a decade ago. Five weeks later, they decided to get married.

A stone mason, Mykhailo, now 33, built his new bride a home just blocks from the sea in Mariupol, where they were both born and raised.

It took years to build both the home and his workshop, where after a long stint working as a contractor he planned to open his own business creating elaborate headstones.

Despite the 2014 invasion of nearby Crimea and on-going military conflict with Russia in eastern Ukraine, the Kurilovas were excited to start a family. They had grown accustomed to the sounds of shelling and news of nearby skirmishes, but they didn't believe the conflict would spread.

"We got used to it, ever

since 2014," Anna said through a translator.

They welcomed Yelysei six years ago and baby Habriel in 2020.

Early this year, like many times before, rumors and reports of a Russian invasion began to circulate.

On the evening of Feb. 23, both Anna and Mykhailo's mothers called asking if they planned to flee before the fighting started.

"We laughed and said the war is beginning already for eight years," Anna said. "If we were worried about war, we wouldn't have the two kids. Because why would you give birth when there is war?"

The next day, Russia invaded.

Russian troops landed in Mariupol and began launching missiles at airfields and Ukrainian military installations. By the end of the day, at least three civilians were reported dead in Mariupol.

The couple's pastor called

and said they could hide in the church's basement. But the thought of leaving the home they worked for years to build was too much, Mykhailo said through a translator.

Mykhailo went out to try and stock up on food, but there was little available in stores except rice and beans. They bartered with their neighbors for five live chickens to butcher.

The next day, all the stores closed in Mariupol. On the third day of the war, electricity was cut off for the entire city. Two days later, it still wasn't on.

"I realized that they're probably not going to turn it on anytime soon," Mykhailo said.

The food in their refrigerator began to sour, and the couple grew concerned about feeding their two young boys. Without power, there was no internet and mobile phones weren't working, so they didn't

know what was happening in other areas of Mariupol, Anna said.

By March 1, the situation was becoming untenable.

"By a mere miracle, we get a call," Anna said. "It was just God, it was our salvation, that call."

Their neighbors, who had fled the city days earlier, told them half of Mariupol had already burned and that they needed to leave.

"They call us and they say, 'You're still in Mariupol? You have to flee,'" Anna said.

By that time, about a fourth of the city had fled.

The neighbors had barely been able to get out of the city, stuck in a miles-long traffic jam of fleeing families.

The next morning, Mykhailo went to his brother's house. When he arrived, he was surprised to find that his other brothers had just arrived.

"We all decided that

we're going to meet up at his house the next day at 6 a.m. and we're all going to drive out," Mykhailo said.

When her husband returned, Anna was shocked Mykhailo was willing to go.

"I was born there. I lived there all my life. I never really traveled anywhere," Mykhailo said. "It was my home. This was my life, because I was building my house. I was building my business. So my life was there in Mariupol."

The decision was between losing their home or losing their lives, the Kurilovas said.

"If we stayed put and waited, you wouldn't see us," Anna said through tears.

On March 3, the family of four piled into its unreliable Soviet-model car, with barely enough gas to get out of the city.

They had to cross a series of security checkpoints. The first, manned by Ukrainian soldiers, was easy to cross

but came with a warning not to proceed, Anna said. Not far up the road was a Russian stop that Ukrainian soldiers and their neighbors had said was treacherous.

With those warnings in mind, the group continued on, but was terrified by the time it arrived at the checkpoint, Anna said.

Russian soldiers screamed at Mykhailo. On the other side of the car, a soldier with a German shepherd knocked on Anna's window and told her not to cry.

"Don't cry, we came to set you free," Anna recalled him saying.

"In my heart, I was so upset," Mykhailo said. "I was just enraged. Who are you to ask me for my documents?"

The convoy, including Mykhailo's two brothers and their families, made it through the Russian post, with most of the occupants in tears.

On their dayslong journey to western Ukraine, the family slept on the floor of churches, took in a pregnant mother after a car accident and had their own car break down, all while functioning on little sleep, with even less food and water.

Beyond exhaustion, the Kurilovas were in a daze when they arrived at their pastor's friend's home in Chernivtsi.

Anna was so tired, she had to be led to the bathroom, incapable of following simple directions.

"They bathed us, they fed us," Anna said. "I was so dizzy, that I wasn't even able to understand or accept anything."

The family tried to cheer them up and be friendly, but Anna was too overwhelmed to even engage.

"Nothing was funny to us," Anna said. "Our mind was just so focused on the war, we accepted every-

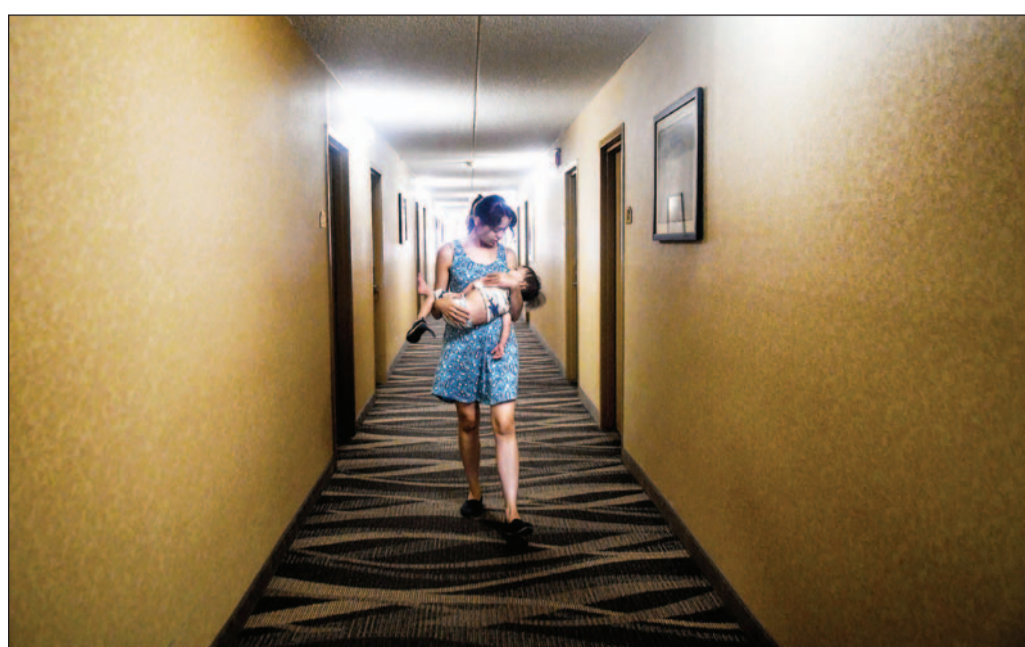


Ukrainian refugees Mykhailo and Anna Kurilova, along with their children, Habriel, 1, and Yelysei, 6, wait for their appointment at the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services on Aug. 2 in Spokane.

See UKRAINE, 10

FROM MARIUPOL

Anna Kurilova carries her sleeping son, Habriel, through the hallway to their room on Aug. 2 at the Thrive Center, a formerly vacant hotel that is now used to house Ukrainian refugees in Spokane.



PHOTOS BY KATHY PLONKA/THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

Mykhailo Kurilova feeds his youngest son, Habriel, 1, while eating breakfast with his wife, Anna, on July 11 at the Thrive Center.

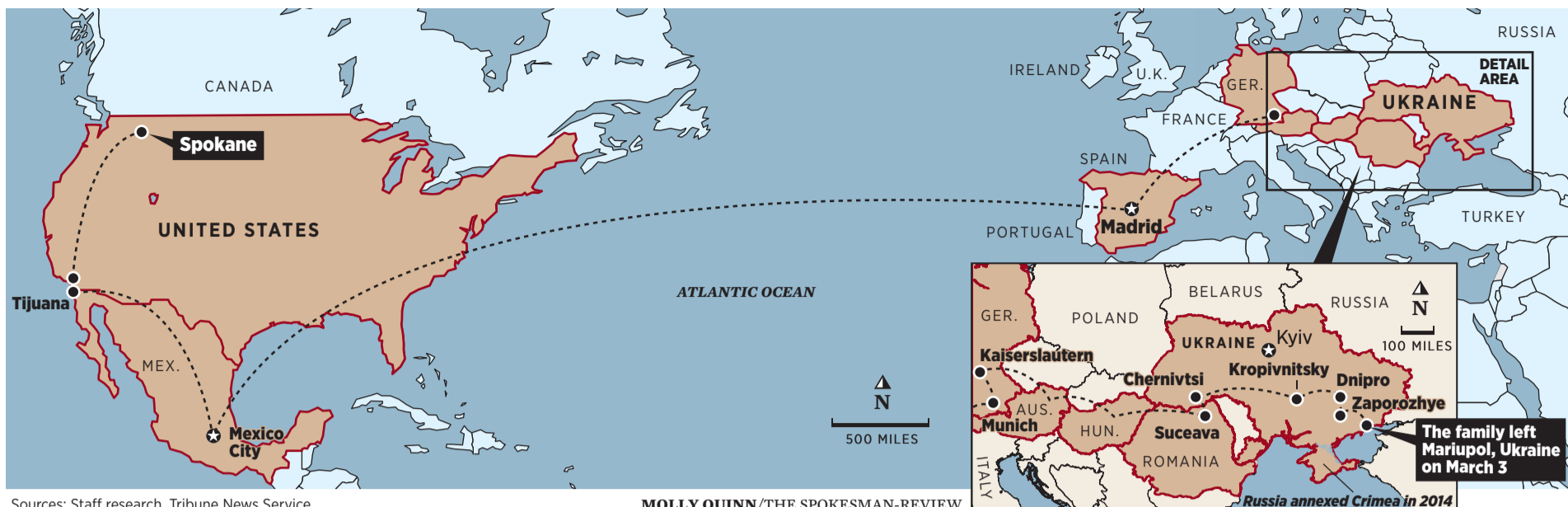
Ukrainian refugees Mykhailo and Anna Kurilova, along with their son, Habriel, 1, attend church Aug. 7 in Spokane Valley.



Habriel Kurilova, 1, looks out the window at cars passing by July 19 on Interstate 90 at the Thrive Center.

FROM MARIUPOL

THE PATH THE FAMILY TOOK FROM THEIR HOMETOWN OF MARIUPOL TO SPOKANE



Sources: Staff research, Tribune News Service

MOLLY QUINN/THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

UKRAINE

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thing as serious.”

After a few hours of sleep, new problems came to mind. Mykhailo had just invested most of their savings in his business, so they didn't have a lot of money. Men were not allowed to leave the country, and the family had no place to stay long term.

Then the couple's pastor told them he sent his family to Germany, and he could arrange travel for Anna and the children as well. But Mykhailo would have to stay behind, due to that Ukrainian government restriction on men of fighting age leaving the country.

The hardest begins

When Anna left Mariupol, she told herself she would never separate her family.

“I will sleep in a shed, but I will not cross the border alone,” Anna said.

But two days after arriving in western Ukraine, Anna – baby in one hand, suitcase in the other and their son walking behind her – crossed the Ukraine-Romania border, leaving Mykhailo behind.

“I sent my wife,” he said, then he went back to the car. “I cry, and again I'm think-

ing, ‘What to do next?’ I don't know the next time I'll see my wife and my family.”

That's when “the hardest began,” Anna said.

She connected with various aid groups in Romania before boarding a bus to Germany. The first day on the road, Anna learned a group of their friends that stayed in Mariupol died. A few families had been hiding in the basement of a church but eventually ran out of food and water, so the men left to find essentials. A bomb hit their car, killing them all, Anna said tearfully.

“I'm traveling as if I'm a widow,” Anna said of when she heard the news. “I don't know if my husband will be next in such a car that's going to be bombed.”

The Russians laid siege to Mariupol in the days after the Kurilovas fled. They bombed schools and hospitals, killing thousands of civilians. One of the worst attacks came on March 9, when a Russian attack seriously damaged a maternity hospital, killing three people and injuring 17, including a mother and baby who later died from their injuries, according to a report detailing Russian war crimes from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. By April,

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Ukrainians continue to pour into town where large Slavic community welcomes them

By Emma Epperly

THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

Slavic immigrants and refugees have landed in Spokane for decades, creating a vibrant community that is now welcoming Ukrainians as they flee the war in their homeland.

In the late 1980s and early 2000s, Slavic immigrants fleeing religious persecution settled in the Spokane area. Earlier this year, one pastor estimated that as many as 50,000 Slavic people live in the region.

Pastor of Pacific Keep Church, Boris Borisov, was one of the first to organize the existing community to help support fleeing Ukrainians. Not long after, Mark Finney founded Thrive International, a nonprofit that quickly received a grant from the Washington state Department of Commerce to open the Thrive Center, a hotel for refugees serving as transitional housing.

About 2,500 Ukrainians have arrived in Spokane since the war began early this year, said Anna Bond-



COURTESY OF BORIS BORISOV

Newly arrived Ukrainians enjoy a Thanksgiving potluck at Pacific Keep Church.

arenko, Thrive Center's assistant manager.

Since opening in June, Thrive has served nearly 1,000 people. The Thrive Center has 95 rentable rooms that are completely full with a waiting list of nearly 40 families.

The first wave of Ukrainians arrived in the United States through the Mexico border on humanitarian parole, Borisov said. There weren't many resources available to them and their work authorizations sometimes took more than six months.

A change to the process last week allowed most Ukrainians to begin work-

ing immediately with just their entry documents, Bondarenko said.

The Thrive Center was key to helping those immigrants get on their feet, he said.

Then the federal United for Ukraine program took off, which gave Ukrainians more support, Borisov said. People arriving through the program got their work authorizations within three to six weeks, he said.

Many of the early arrivals to Spokane are taking English classes, their children are enrolled in school and they're working to integrate into Spokane, Borisov said.

His church, like many other Slavic churches, has grown with dozens of new members. Recently, Pacific Keep held a Thanksgiving potluck where hundreds of people chatted, ate and made new friends.


While the flow of Ukrainians coming to Spokane has slowed, Borisov estimates another 1,000 people will arrive over the course of the next year.


The Thrive Center has a decent turnover rate but a constant wait list remains. The nonprofit is hosting a fundraiser called “A Home for the Holidays” next month in hopes of raising money to help more immigrants next year.

The nonprofit also began offering monthly volunteer training and recently completed a coat drive.

With four to five Ukrainian families arriving in Spokane each week, there's always more to do, Borisov said.





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