



PHOTO BY JOE GLODE

Mikhail Mitkov-Baklanovsky and his wife, Tatyana Putra, at their home in Southwest Portland. Mitkov-Baklanovsky is holding a chest seal from SAM Medical Products, designed to allow airflow to a punctured lung. The couple has been sending supplies to the Ukrainian army since September.

everyone together. I've never seen it in Portland before."

Giving Hope is also sending aid to help with the evacuation of people stranded in war-torn areas.

"Most of the people left in the cities are elders and women with small children. Everyone who was able-bodied left, either to Russia or to fight, or they left a long time ago," Mishchuck says. "Many people are stuck living in basements. There are mothers and children whose husbands abandoned them. We are helping to evacuate people who are willing to evacuate."

For those who have already fled war-torn areas, there are other problems.

"People are sleeping in railroad cars. Local and official governments can't do anything for them because of their lack of preparedness," he says. "There are areas where they have no electricity, no water, no heat — and it's still freezing over there."

He says his organization is not taking sides.

"The goal is to help people in need, and both sides are suffering," he says.

"People need to understand the peace agreement is on paper, but it's not being upheld. There is shooting on an hourly basis, and people are living in constant fear. The humanitarian crisis is growing as we speak. Many people in the Ukraine grow their own food, and they can't do that when there is shelling and bombing," he says.

Since Street Roots spoke with Mishchuck, there have been multiple reports of an upsurge in fighting in eastern Ukraine.

Like many other Ukrainians who immigrated to the U.S. in the 1980s and 1990s, Mishchuck was escaping religious persecution. Both his father and his grandfather were jailed for their Protestant faith.

Just as much as the conflict has brought together Ukraine supporters, there is a divide in the local Slavic community between those who support Ukraine and those who support pro-Russian separatists.

Local Ukrainians who spoke with Street Roots all say Russian television stations are partly to blame for this difference in opinion. They say that they are more widely available in the U.S. than Ukrainian stations and that Russian President Vladimir Putin uses technology and media for propaganda against Ukraine.

"Parents and children — they fight over it because parents watch Russian TV and kids are just living their real lives," says Putra, Mitkov-Baklanovsky's wife. "So many divorces because wife is watching Russian soap opera and news and says Ukrainians are Nazis." She and her husband say they have lost longtime friends



PHOTO BY JOE GLODE

Vancouver resident and Ukrainian immigrant Mikhail Pavenko has used Facebook to solicit donations.

over differences of opinion on the conflict. Their son says most people younger than him believe whatever their parents believe. He, too, has lost friends over the conflict.

While pro-Russian forces may be using television, Ukrainian supporters are using Facebook. It's not only serving as a platform for organizing and sharing donation drop-off locations in Portland; it's also how many U.S. citizens are connecting with volunteers in Ukraine. Social media, especially Facebook, played a significant role in organizing the 2013 protests in Kiev, the Kyiv Post reported.

"Thank God for Facebook," says Vancouver resident and Ukrainian immigrant Mikhail Pavenko. The 28-year-old has used the site to solicit donations from people in Clark County, Wash. "(Ukrainian) kids are posting these things on Facebook that the whole world sees, and then we have people connecting from all over the world."

He's discovered through social media what supplies are needed and where.

"Ukraine was in shambles forever, they would post pictures of checkpoints, and these soldiers would be standing in Adidas with old AK-47 — I mean, they had nothing," Pavenko says. He meets monthly with a group of about 40 other Clark County residents who are working to send relief and supplies to Ukraine.

He shared photos of supplies they've collected and

Ukraine: The second cease-fire

The region's war rages on, and the situation is changing every day

BY ANDREY KURKOV
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Just 10 years ago, many Europeans would have had trouble finding Ukraine on a map. Now practically everyone knows where it is, but no one can predict the country's future: How and when will the Russia-Ukraine conflict end? To clarify, this "conflict" refers not only to the situation in the war-torn Donbas region, still partially under the control of pro-Russian separatists and Russian "military volunteers," but also to the annexation of Crimea and the terrorist acts organized by pro-Russian forces in other parts of the country. Almost every morning there are news reports of yet another explosion in one of the major cities



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of Ukraine. There was an explosion in the center of Odessa the night before I wrote this article.

These are troubled times for Ukraine. The country's economy is in dire straits, and people are worried about their future. The double impact of war and the economic crisis has knocked two-thirds off the value of the national currency, the hryvnia. But Ukrainians are considerably more worried about the situation in Donbas than the financial crisis. Despite the second "Minsk cease-fire," war in the

Donbas region rages on. No longer the entire length of the frontline — which stretches for hundreds of kilometers — but at certain points that hold strategic significance for Russia and the separatists. Ukrainian troops are still coming under fire outside the city of Mariupol on the Sea of Azov. This port city is seen as a key target by separatists because it could enable Russia to secure a crucial land corridor to Crimea. Military operations are also continuing elsewhere in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions, where the separatists are attempting to "straighten out" the border — less euphemistically, to seize more territory.

I had a phone call last week from an Italian friend, whose wife is Ukrainian. He asked my advice on how dangerous it would be to drive to the Kherson region, which borders Crimea. His wife's mother lives there, and she wants to visit her. I told him that things were reasonably calm there, but the following day I read in the news that there had been an exchange of fire at a checkpoint near Kherson. The situation is changing, and it's changing every day. While the leaders of European countries express "cautious optimism" and maintain that the situation in Donbas is improving, Russia continues to supply arms and military equipment to the separatists via the 409 km (about 250 miles) of the Ukrainian-Russian border that is out of Ukrainian control. Nobody knows what news tomorrow will bring.

I was in Donbas myself recently and spent three days talking to military personnel and civilians in Slavyansk, Kramatorsk and Severodonetsk. All three cities have been liberated from separatist and Russian forces, yet people there still have less of a sense of stability than those living farther from the frontline. Many people in Severodonetsk and Slavyansk are not actually opposed to the idea of Russian occupation. They are reluctant to talk about it openly, but the fact is that they don't feel any particular loyalty to Ukraine either. Sociologists visiting these and other cities in the Donbas region have noticed an interesting pattern. There are often as many pro-Russian

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