



Photos by Lydia Ely/The Astorian

Matthew, 5, hides in his mother's arms.

Refugees: Shekhovtsova's home is in Irpin, just outside Kyiv

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When the war started and Andriy Shekhovtsov was forced to remain, the Millers worked on logistics for getting Shekhovtsova and their sons to Oregon.

Their travels were expedited because Shekhovtsova already had a U.S. visa and her sons have American citizenship.

"We had to make sure she got here as soon as possible," Heather Miller said.

Miller and her daughter, Oxana, describe a deep emotional connection to Ukraine, where the family's four oldest children grew up and where their four middle children were adopted. The family frequently returns for visits to see old friends. Miller has left open the possibility of bringing in more refugees.

"We might be receiving more refugees — if they can get here," she said. "But that's really a big 'if.'"

Journey to the North Coast

Shekhovtsova's home is in Irpin, just outside Ukraine's capital of Kyiv. When Russia launched the invasion in late February, the family had been on vacation, visiting her parents in western Ukraine.

Although far from the violence at the time, the family made their way to the border with Poland with the intent of leaving. Martial law soon came down, barring Andriy Shekhovtsov from leaving the country.

After saying goodbye to her husband, Shekhovtsova took their sons and fled to Romania. Despite long lines at the borders and nearly missing their flight, the three safely traveled to an airport in Hungary.

"Everything happened basically within less than 48 hours," Andriy Shekhovtsov said over a video call. "When everything happens so fast, I don't think you can completely understand what was going on because I had a feeling that I was just letting them go for a little bit, maybe a couple days or a week."

"But then at the border, it just really hit me — I don't know how long it's going to take, or even if I'll be able to see them again. At that



Matthew and Luka play with a toy car set.

moment it was hard."

The separation has had an impact on their children, but Shekhovtsova remains grateful they have not been exposed to the violence back home.

"They miss daddy, of course, so they often ask if he's not in the army, if he's not at war, if he's still alive. Every day they check on this," she said. "But as kids, they enjoy being here around new people, new places, new tastes. I think they are lucky because they haven't heard the booms and other things that other kids did."

Since his wife and children left, Andriy Shekhovtsov has stayed in western Ukraine, working remotely, volunteering and coordinating evacuation efforts.

For the moment, he has not been tasked with fighting in the war. He is in the last wave of civilians who have to join the military. But the country's situation is rapidly changing.

The uncertainty has weighed on Shekhovtsova.

"It's been hard to adjust, because all of my heart and thoughts are in Ukraine," she said. "I would like to go home so severely. I would like to go now. I know I cannot do this ... It's hard to sleep. It's hard to act normal in life."

While she has daily contact with her husband, Shekhovtsova has been unable to keep in touch with many friends and family.

"The worst part, for some people I know, I still don't know if they are alive, because I cannot reach them," she said. "Every day, I wait for a short message, just a word: 'alive.'"

Community support

Miller has been overwhelmed by the community

support since Shekhovtsova and her boys arrived.

Peter and Christina Grauff have provided the family with a place to live in Astoria.

Friends of the Millers are seeking to get Shekhovtsova a car from a dealership in Warrenton.

The Assistance League of the Columbia Pacific, a nonprofit that offers philanthropic programs through schools, has helped get Luka and Matthew situated. Both are set to attend classes soon.

Others have helped with expenses.

"I am very blessed with the people who have us because they opened their house and they're ready to give us their car and everything. I am in her socks right now because she noticed that I don't have enough clothing," Shekhovtsova said, laughing while lifting up her pant leg. "... It just brings tears to my eyes how people open their hearts to help with whatever they can."

The family has set up a GoFundMe account to help refugee teachers from a private school in Irpin who are providing remote instruction to Ukrainian students.

Miller describes a lot of tears and a lack of sleep in the days since the war started. Although thousands of miles away from the country she used to call home, she is doing whatever she can to make a positive impact.

"I can raise awareness," she said. "We can direct funds to people that we personally know that we can 100% trust. We can help support them in that way."

"And pray. We just never stopped doing that."



Lydia Ely/The Astorian

Police investigated a suspicious device on Thursday outside of Home Depot in Warrenton.

Bomb hoax at Home Depot in Warrenton

By ERICK BENDEL
The Astorian

A device fashioned to resemble an explosive that was left at Home Depot in Warrenton on Thursday led to an evacuation of the retailer and a visit from the bomb squad.

In the afternoon, an employee found an object with exposed wires and marked with political graffiti in the store's parking lot. The employee brought it to the returns desk inside the store.

Warrenton police were called shortly before 5 p.m. An officer photographed the device and sent pictures to Oregon State Police. The Warrenton Fire Department was also dispatched.

Emergency responders emptied the building and parking lot of employees and customers. The city's Public Works Department

closed off the area to the public.

Oregon State Police's Salem-based explosives unit arrived on scene and dismantled what turned out to be a hoax device.

"It truly did look like (a bomb)," Sgt. Jim Pierce, of the Warrenton Police Department, said. "However, it was nonexplosive when they took it apart."

The area was reopened shortly before 8:30 p.m.

The incident is under investigation. No suspects have been identified.

Anyone who was at Home Depot between roughly 4 and 5 p.m. on Thursday and saw anything suspicious in the parking lot, or who has any information, is asked to contact Pierce at jpierce@ci.warrenton.or.us, the police department's general number — 503-861-2235 — or through Warrenton's dispatch center at 503-325-8661.

Gray whales: 'Everybody's connected to the ocean'

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Watch Center in Depoe Bay has been closed throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. It will reopen to visitors in late spring.

As people head to overlooks and viewpoints to watch gray whales pass by, Torres hopes they keep several things in mind.

"Everybody's connected

to the ocean with the day-to-day actions we do," she said.

One of the main ways whales can be impacted is through people's shopping choices.

"When we buy things that come from China, they all come on a boat and that boat makes a lot of noise and has ship strikes to the whales," Torres said. "We

are more connected than we realize."

Last year, Torres and her team, GEMM Lab, launched the website IndividuWhale.com, identifying individual gray whales and providing detailed profiles of each whale.

This story is part of a collaboration between *The Astorian* and Coast Community Radio.

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