

Judsonia relief project sends needed supplies, hope to Ukraine

PHOTO BY: Kelvin Green

Volunteers Lorri Gardner, left, and Joni Mackey help sort clothing and various supplies that will be shipped to Ukraine as part of a relief mission from a local warehouse in Judsonia.

In the tiny town of Judsonia in White County, a relief effort, Ukraine Missions, has been in operation for more than 10 years. On a recent frosty morning, nine men and the director of their efforts, John L. Kachelman Jr., worked in synchronized, almost mechanical, harmony as they unloaded a box truck from CURE (Compassionate Utilization of Resources) of Fort Smith.

From the nondescript green metal building with the sign that says "Life Resources International," this year alone, humanitarian aid in 31 40-foot-high cube containers weighing 620,080 pounds has been shipped with a total value of over \$4 million in commodities.

A shipment will go out at the end of December once again for Ukraine.

After Kachelman went on a mission trip to the area in 1994, while he was living in Kentucky, and saw conditions there, he knew help had to be brought to the people, he said in a recent interview at the mission's warehouse, at 1006 N. First. St.

"Through the work of humanitarian-aid projects that were a part of the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Department of Defense, I brought the work back to the Judsonia Church of Christ," Kachelman said.

Then in 2012, he took the mission to the College Church of Christ at Searcy, where it is has an office at 712 E. Race St., as well as at 2934 Moore St. in Searcy.

"These folks are so kind and generous," Kachelman said of the people of Ukraine. "They do not have anything, but what they do have, they will give. They [do not have enough] food, yet they invite me in and put all the food out for me. You hate to take the food, but it would be an insult to them not to," he said.

Kachelman said the efforts of Ukraine Missions have been to "help develop and strengthen the infrastructure of a nation's health care, educational system and the abandoned young and elderly."

Hundreds of volunteers help in this project of the Churches of Christ. The main thrusts are those of the effort or to give medical assistance, as well as aid, to orphanages, the elderly and schools.



On this recent unloading of the supplies from Fort Smith, several regular volunteers were on hand to assist with the effort: Wilt Martin, B.R. Barden, David Lawyer, James Mackey, Lynn Smith, Howard Morris, Charles Morris, Mike Caldwell and Graham Amy.

The many volunteers who help locally are retired church workers, retired military personnel, retired educators, homemakers, medical personnel, farmers and carpenters, Kachelman said.

Kachelman, who preached for 40 years, grew up in Alabama and attended a congregation there that regularly led assistance efforts when disasters struck, he said, including Gulf hurricanes, tornadoes and flooding.

"I never dreamed that I would be involved in a global humanitarian-aid program that has touched 23 foreign nations. This was a door the Lord opened and has not allowed to be shut. Every time I think the door is closing, incredible opportunities continue to present themselves," he said.

"We see on television these people hurrying with their families with nothing but maybe a small bag of belongings," Kachelman said.

"These people have nothing as basic as a manual can opener or a bar of soap," he said. "Socks, mittens, knit caps and hand warmers are popular items that the people there do not have."

Personal hygiene items are also a main need, including bar soap, hand-sanitizing gels, hand towels or small towels, washcloths, deodorant, shampoo and conditioner, skin lotion, toothpaste and toothbrushes, small combs or hairbrushes, disposable razors, fingernail clippers and nail files, small packs of tissues or wipes, and women's products. The items should be put into a 2-gallon zipper-lock bag, he said.

"The [2-gallon zip-close] bags will go to displaced people who have been driven out and have nothing and need everything," Kachelman said.

Family buckets filled with supplies are also prepared and can contain personal-care items such as Vaseline or baby oil, Advil or aspirin, lip balm, antibiotic ointment and Band-Aids. Other welcome items include new shoes (flip-flops, Crocks, etc.), clothesline/ropes, rain ponchos, plastic cups/bowls, matches (small boxes), candles, metal stirring spoons and metal spatulas.

Large plastic buckets with lids, smaller buckets and small plastic containers with lids (butter tubs, etc.) are needed to ship items and to keep grains dry and bug-free.

Medical supplies are often donated by hospitals such as the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences Medical Center, Baptist Health Medical Center and Arkansas

Children's Hospital, as well as clinics. The facilities contribute outdated items such as hospital beds and furniture. Donated supplies also include walkers, potty chairs, crutches and wheelchairs, which are all needed, Kachelman said.

"Many hospitals have these items in storage or to discard, and they will be welcomed in these destitute nations. One wheelchair looking rather dilapidated on this recent unloading day was whisked away by a volunteer who said it would be cleaned up and put to use," Kachelman said.

"They call us and say they have supplies," he said of Unity Health, which now includes the hospital in Newport. "They have been a big help; they have been wonderful. [Newport's hospital] has a whole storage area [for the items]."

Supplies are also sent to orphanages where many children have just one set of clothing and often have no toys, Kachelman said. The mission is now allowed to transport toys, as well as clothing and other items, he said.

"Every child needs a toy," he said. He told of a small boy who received "a red three-wheeled firetruck that he

clutches.”

Kachelman said another primary need of Ukraine Missions is the reinstatement of assistance with shipping costs.

Ukraine Missions has to come up with all shipping costs for the all-volunteer effort because there are no salaries and no overhead, he said of the bare-bones setup.

Since May 2014, the mission has had no help with shipping costs, and this year alone so far, the cost has amounted to \$81,400 that could otherwise have been put to use for supplies, rather than transporting them, he said. It costs an average of \$5,500 to \$6,500 to ship one container (40-by-8-by-9 1/2 feet) that weighs 18,000 pounds, he said.

Kachelman has made three trips this year so far to Ukraine. He sees firsthand the “tears of joy” and hears the “shouts of excitement, and the questions as to why people so far away would want to help them,” he said.

Another main mission of the project is to distribute the word of God and his teachings and love, as several letters Kachelman shared attest.

“Thank you for your mission work in Ukraine and especially for the retreat that you conducted in the mountains — looking forward to future classes,” one letter states.

And soldiers, Anti-Terrorist Operation troopers from the Lutsk Border Squad of Army Unit 9971 wrote, “Thank you for your support, medicines, foods and sweets, for clothes and all other things. Hats off to you!”

“Thank you for your mercy and considerate approach to the needy,” wrote V.M. Korolenko, director of the Department of Kherson Regional State Administration Health Care Department. “We are sincerely thankful to you and your church for your support and benevolent help. Difficult times we’re facing now make it very difficult to find someone who is as concerned about others as he is about himself, and it’s wonderful to realize there are such people.”

Tax-deductible cash donations may be mailed to Ukraine Missions, a 501(c)(3) organization, to the College Church of Christ, in care of Ukraine Missions, 712 W. Race Ave., Searcy, AR 72143; to Ukraine Missions, 2934 Moore St., Searcy, AR 72143; or to Life Resources International, 1006 N. First St., Judsonia, AR 72081.

Items for the mission may be dropped off at these locations as well, Kachelman said.