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Lamorinda volunteers travel abroad to aid Ukrainian refugees

By Sora O'Doherty

Since the outset of the war in Ukraine, residents of Lamorinda have been trying to find ways to help Ukrainian refugees: those who make it here, those still in Ukraine, or those who make it to Poland. Charles MacNulty, longtime Moraga resident known locally for his volunteer work with, among others, the Moraga-Orinda Fire District, wanted to make a difference, if he could. He first attempted to gather medical supplies to ship to Poland, but there were insurmountable obstacles. Failing that, MacNulty thought, if he couldn't send help, he would go and help personally.

MacNulty and his wife had planned a river cruise in Europe in May, and MacNulty determined that he would go to Poland after the cruise and offer his assistance. A former medic during the Vietnam war, a certified drone pilot and fork lift operator, he felt that he had volunteer skills that could be useful. Before leaving, he reached out to The International Committee of the Red Cross and passed a background check to allow him to volunteer.

Leaving his cruise in Basil, Switzerland, MacNulty made his way to Warsaw where he contacted the Red Cross. He was directed to Lublin, and from there he rented a car to travel to Dolhobychow, Zosin, and Hrubieszow. While there he was used to ferry people from one location to another. He met volunteers in Poland from many countries, including Italy, Australia, Ireland, and the U.S. Most of the other volunteers spoke Polish, which MacNulty does not. The volunteers and the Red Cross staff welcomed refugees from Ukraine and provided them with food and supplies. To MacNulty's surprise, many of the Ukrainians had already been to Poland and returned to Ukraine, but were now coming back to buy cars and trucks, since Ukraine had dropped the tax on bringing in vehicles. The line to return to Ukraine was some 15 miles long, and moved about a mile or two per day. However, MacNulty observed that everyone was patient and polite. MacNulty spent about 10 days in Poland, and was tempted to stay longer. However, the help that was needed at that point involved driving into Ukraine, where the Russians were not welcoming. "I've been shot at," MacNulty recalled, "and I didn't like it!" The International Red Cross is still looking for people to volunteer in Poland in aid of Ukrainian refugees.

Link for more information: <https://www.redcross.org/about-us/our-work/international-services.html>

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