

# Ukrainian family settles in to new home



Sara Safdie, left, is treated to Ukrainian pumpkin pie during a visit with (from left) Alex Kushnarov, Mila Kushnarova, and Daria and Eduard Levit.

## Jewish community very important to family

BY SARA SAFDIE

On Jan. 28, 2023, the four humans and three cats in the Levit/Kushnarov family ended their nearly yearlong flight from war torn Ukraine to safety in Portland. (See related story on how Portlanders aided that journey.)

Sadly, their 18-year-old cat Vsevolod had to be put to sleep just a month after they arrived. Though the loss of their beloved cat was one more tragedy in a year filled with them, Eduard and Daria Levit, and Eduard's parents, Alex Kushnarov and Mila Kushnarova, are now settling into a new life with hopes for a bright future.

I interviewed the family after being served an incredible Ukrainian pumpkin pie (they love to share baked goods with guests). So, how is the family adjusting to their new circumstances?

Eduard is the spokesperson for the family.

### What made you decide to come to Portland?

"It's a very beautiful place, a very calm place, a very beautiful nature place," says Eduard, noting he studied Portland on the internet before deciding. Knowing they would be welcomed by a strong Welcome Circle in the Jewish community was an important factor.

"A Jewish community here – that's very important," he says. "I like being Jewish and all things in the Jewish community." He adds it was not always easy being Jewish in Ukraine, "but it's my life."

### How difficult was it to get here?

"It was very difficult because I grew up and lived my whole life in Kharkiv," he says. "When we went to another city, we understood it was the same and very dangerous."

Knowing Ukraine wasn't safe for his family or future children, they moved on to Poland.

Their flight to Portland was difficult because of their three cats. Also, it was only the second time his parents had flown. But they understood they "would be in a safe place with good people."

"Marc Blattner made everything (arrangements for the flights with the cats), and we had a good trip. Marc made a lot (possible) for our family, and it was an amazing job."

### What did you think when you saw your new house?

"It was like my home. I thought I could now sleep. We had everything we needed. It was comfortable."

When I brought up the prepared foods from the CNS Chesed Committee, Eduard reiterated that having a strong Jewish community was very important to them. Asked about JFCS and Susan Greenberg, he replied that it was a big surprise when Susan came to give them cash and gift cards to local supermarkets.

"My mother and father cried," says Eduard. "In Ukraine, everyone has to help themselves, but here we got help from the Jewish community. I want to

## It takes a community

BY SARA SAFDIE

Seeing the television images of Russia's invasion of Ukraine Feb. 24, 2022, I desperately wanted to help the refugees pouring out of Ukraine, but there seemed nothing I could do other than donate money.

Then we learned that HIAS was forming "Welcome Circles" to help Ukrainians who had fled the war.

Congregation Neveh Shalom's Rabbi David Kosak and I spoke with a HIAS rabbi about establishing a Circle. Rabbi Kosak asked Rebecca Smetana and me to cochair the Circle. Rabbi Kosak has provided important help whenever needed as well as guidance and wisdom. The Circle grew to nine members, all CNS congregants, each one having specific responsibilities for the HIAS application.

We received HIAS certification in early September. In December, we met with the Levit/Kushnarov family on Zoom, along with their three cats. We started making arrangements to bring four Ukrainians to our Portland Jewish community. I want to thank everyone in our generous community who has made this possible.

CNS provided a way to let congregants know about this family and what they needed for their new home. The outpouring of donations was astonishing: new furniture including beds; new linens; new kitchen items; and other essentials. Danit Rothstein at Community Warehouse donated her time and its truck to deliver various items.

The family's new landlords, Tom and Jenny Brady, provided furniture, bicycles, kitchen supplies, and, most importantly, permission and resources to garden freely in their new yard.

The Jewish Federation of Greater Portland and JFGP President and CEO Marc Blattner provided enormous support. The Federation's Ukraine Campaign raised \$600,000 to aid Ukrainians, including \$150,000 to assist those who come to Portland with rent, utilities, food and other expenses (another Welcome Circle at Shir Tikvah will welcome a new arrival soon). Marc spent hours making airline reservations to accommodate their cats. He also donated a great television and took them out to their first meal in an American restaurant.

Susan Greenberg at Jewish Family & Child Service has also been extremely supportive. One of her Russian-speaking caseworkers helped fill out government forms; JFCS also provided other support (see main story).

The generosity of the Portland Jewish community has been beyond amazing.

Continued on next page



Mila cuddles Borys and Daria cuddles Vsevolod, who along with a third cat Stepan, accompanied the family from Ukraine to Portland. Sadly, just days after this photo was taken, 18-year-old Vsevolod had to be put to sleep.

## Family (from previous page)

say thank you so much to the Federation and JFCS because we have everything. They bought our family new telephones and made internet service. It's very important because Daria's family still lives in Kharkiv, so we have the opportunity to communicate with them."

### Do you still need anything?

"No, the Federation, Neveh Shalom, JFCS and the Circle gave us everything. The main thing I want to do is help people who helped me." He wants to "meet with the people of the Jewish community and thank them for this help."

He also thanked Rebecca (Smetana) for all her help, as well as Ellen (Dunn) and Ripu Malhotra for their English lessons.

"Corinne (Spiegel) is a beautiful woman and helps us study English." He wanted to thank Shelley Selph for all her medical help and Arleen Zucker for her help with job preparation. Finally, he wanted to thank Carol Stampfer for filling out the government sponsorship applications.

"I know it's people who gave me the opportunity to start a new life here. Thank you all so much."

### What's next?

Next, they want to find jobs so they can pay for things themselves. Eduard is a highly skilled IT person but can also drive trucks. Daria is an incredible graphic designer and was a makeup artist. Eduard's parents, Alex and Tamila, are less proficient in English, but Alex is a great gardener, mechanic and truck driver. I can attest that Tamila is an excellent cook and housekeeper.

They now have the permission to work here, so if you know of job opportunities for them, please contact me, Sara Safdie ([ssafdie526@gmail.com](mailto:ssafdie526@gmail.com)), or Congregation Neveh Shalom Program Director Lisa Richmond at [richmond@nevehshalom.org](mailto:richmond@nevehshalom.org) or 503-246-8831.

In the meantime, they are thrilled to be here and to be safe.

# JFCS needs history sleuths

This is JFCS' 75th year, the perfect excuse to celebrate the agency's past presidents and remember those who were in that role but are no longer with us. Yet, JFCS has an incomplete list of past presidents, including their years of service.

This is where you come in. If you recognize a name (or two) missing from the list below, or a blank beside an individual's name where their years of service should be, please contact JFCS Communications Manager Jenn Director Knudsen at [jdirectorknudsen@jfcs-portland.org](mailto:jdirectorknudsen@jfcs-portland.org).

Thank you for channeling your inner Sherlock Holmes. You can help ensure that all of JFCS' past presidents receive the recognition they deserve for their support of the community's only Jewish social services agency.

Each one will be recognized at JFCS' 75th anniversary event, "Celebrating Generations," May 18, at Castaway, featuring special guest China Forbes of Pink Martini. For more information on the celebration, visit [jfcs-portland.org/celebrating-generations/](http://jfcs-portland.org/celebrating-generations/).

## JFCS PAST PRESIDENTS

Marianne Buchwalter, z'l	1985: Steve Kantor, z'l
May Georges z'l	1989-1991: Mark Rosenbaum
Pearl Gevurtz, z'l	Bernard Asarnow
Alan Goldsmith, z'l	Miriam Feder
Harriet Steinberg Towne, z'l	1996-1998: Bernice Shulevitz, z'l
1962-64: Leah Durkheimer, z'l	1998-2000: Howard Feldman
1964-66: Eve Rosenfeld	2000: Naomi Kaufman-Price
1966-68: Madeline Nelson, z'l	1998-2000: Howard Feldman
1969: Alan Goldsmith	2002-2004: 2nd Beverly Bookin
Yonah Geller, z'l	Lucy Kivel
Early 1970s: Jack Schwartz	Lesley Isenstein
Merritt Yoelin, z'l	Deena Klein
1975-1976: Leonard Goldberg, z'l	Betsy Russell
1979-1981: Elaine (Weil) Savinar	2005-2006 and 2008: I. Kenneth Davis
1981-1983: Richard (Dick) Dobrow	2007: Michael Wendrow
Clifford Alterman, z'l	2010-14: Michael Millender
Frances Markewitz, z'l	2015-17: Les Soltesz, z'l
Augusta Reinhardt, z'l	2017-19: Lee Cordova
Charlotte Schwartz, z'l	2019-2023: Larry Holzman
1980s: 1st Beverly Bookin	



## Women celebrate at Jewish Oasis

Fifty women shared feminine energy, joy, love, dancing and tears at the Feb. 26 "Celebrate the Jewish Woman" gathering at the Chabad Jewish Oasis. "In my life, I have not experienced the kind of energy that I experienced that night," said one participant. "Such an array of Jewish Women together in one room. It's so powerful and the way it's meant to be." Goldy Plotkin shared powerful anecdotes and real life examples about the feminine ability to uncover, kindle and nurture the spark of holiness found within every part of the world through the three mitzvot given to women (lighting Shabbat candles, separating challah and the laws of family life). The Oasis hosts weekly women's coffee gatherings and other events especially for women. For more information on future events, visit [jewishoasis.com](http://jewishoasis.com) or call 503-246-5437.