

Union Masonic Lodge's applauds King community for aiding 163 Ukrainian refugee families

By Jim Stewart

Piper Bruce Etherington led multiple processions of dignitaries, charitable champions, selfless citizens, and grateful Ukrainian families into the comfy confines of Union Masonic Lodge 118 in downtown Schomberg on a recent Tuesday night. The skirl of the pipes set both a mournful and triumphant tone to the evening that acknowledged the atrocities committed by Russian forces during their invasion of the Ukraine, but also celebrated the dozens of King Township and surrounding area citizens who have risen to the charitable challenges of assisting 163 Ukrainian refugee families in their hour of need. The displaced families have been supported in myriad ways by the greater King community and MC Brent Palmer welcomed all attendees including keynote speaker and coordinator Robert Lawrence who addressed over 100 guests. Lawrence was gladdened by the presence of the attendees who were being recognized: "It's a view into people's hearts. Kudos to all the people who came to tonight's ceremony. It's so rewarding to do this work as a fraternity and it was nice hearing the insights into the experiences of people who received certificates. The Ukrainians have experienced the worst part of human nature." Lawrence's moving speech "delivered as the Coordinator of the Ukrainian Donation and Support Centre in King City" was broken by spontaneous rounds of applause. The retired teacher closed his address with a poignant summation: "The bottom line is there has been so much happiness generated by the good actions of the citizens honored tonight, but there has also been so much heartache for the Ukrainian people." The ceremony honoring so many charitable contributors was important to Robert Lawrence's Masonic Lodge "a mainstay in downtown Schomberg since 1860" because its mission for 163 years has been "about fraternity. We keep a low profile as a fraternity and we don't normally present cheques in public. Instead, we give them quietly to people in need, but tonight was an exception." Lawrence explained that the Lodge changed its usual protocols due to the urgent plight of the Ukrainian people who have sought refuge in Canada and for those who remain in their war-torn country. He expressed concerns that "Canadians might think that the Russian-Ukrainian conflict is tailing off, but it is not. The Ukrainian Grand Lodge wanted the press here tonight to make sure that people know the horror of war is still being experienced within the Ukraine." Lawrence also noted that it was the Ukrainian Grand Lodge's pleas for help worldwide that catalyzed the Schomberg Lodge. All in all, more than \$20,000 has been distributed to help Ukrainian families get on their feet after arriving with very few material possessions. Lawrence noted that "It is not the intention of all Ukrainian families to stay here. Most are on 3-year visas. Some 43,000 Ukrainians have visas and 400,000 are being processed." In addition to providing the Ukrainian refugees with cash for their temporary stay in Canada, King residents have donated lumber and other building materials to create 22 clothing racks for the Lodge's storefront charitable operation so that donated clothing, food, furniture, and household items can be stored, displayed, and readied for distribution. In addition to donating these necessary items, the best way for King residents to help the recently-arrived Ukrainian families in the community is to donate to the dedicated link <https://gofund.me/8bb46346> or email Robert Lawrence at robelaWr@hotmail.com. Sunflower-adorned "Support Ukraine" lawn signs are on sale at the Masonic Lodge for \$20 each, with 100% of the proceeds donated to the Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal. The Masonic Lodge ceremonial team presented certificates to an array of dignitaries, groups, service clubs, and citizens who have contributed to the Ukrainian Donation and Support Centre in King City including the Township of King represented by Mayor Steve Pelligrini; MP Anna Roberts; the Store Staff including Masonic Brother Archie and Maggie Paterson, Manny Raspberry, Kathy Campbell, Mary Dunne, and Brother Doug Morden; Downsizing Divas (Gail Shields and Arlene Stevenson); Barrie Kiwanis (Cathy Locke, Helen Ellement); Uxbridge Town Trolleys (Michael Bryant and Pauline Kiely); True Blue Member (Brother Charlie Wilson); Brother Barry Pike; King City Foodbank (Leona Zadoyko and Carole Ann Trabert); Stouffville and Midland Ukraine Groups (Victoria Corrigan and Marika Paquin); King City Bible Church (Lisa Lethangue and Rosa Mae Lamb); Emergent (Brother Michael Ichelson and Sylvia Ichelson and Shari Silverman); Canadian Battalion (Olga Lastovetska); Georgina Post (Mike Anderson); Ukrainian Signs (Mara and Tom Wray); and the Penetanguishene Lions (Ken Woods, Joep Dianing, and Randy Hargreaves). The honorees were led into the Lodge by Piper Bruce Etherington and a Ceremonial Team comprised of Brother Jeff Laceby, Brother Mike Winties for Brother Jason Dent, Brother Caleb Riches, Master of Ceremonies Brother Brent Palmer, and Brother Robert Lawrence. The Ceremonial team also welcomed and thanked the Brethern of Rowland Lodge 646, Malone Lodge 512, Tuscan Lodge 99, Rising Sun Lodge 129, and their own membership of Union Lodge 118 for their help with the Ukrainian Donation and Support Centre. Perhaps the most moving

speech of the ceremony was delivered by Ukrainian refugee Serhii Filatov who, in the company of his wife Titiana and daughter Dasha, thanked those assembled through a translator: "We are so appreciative of all the things that have been done. So many Canadians have been willing to help Canadians. Tonight, we as Ukrainians see all the help from you ??both in the Ukraine and here in Canada. Your tenderness, help, and support are so appreciated. Because of your help, there are many more Ukrainians that can fight the Russian fascist regime."The ceremony at the Masonic Lodge was followed by a social visit to the Schomberg Pub on Main Street. Lawrence acknowledged that it was "Nice to kick back and converse with the people who have done so much. The Schomberg Pub's a treasure ??it has all the charms of a British Pub and the owners extended their hours of operation to serve our community group."King Township is blessed with many fraternities, social clubs, and service clubs that contribute mightily to the needs of the community. Many were recognized during the ceremony, but that night was the Masonic Lodge's turn to make Schomberg and the surrounding area a welcoming place for displaced people in need of compassion and support. As Robert Lawrence maintained, "It's all about fraternity."