

*85<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Ukrainian National Women's League of America –  
“Assistance and Caring for the Elderly”*

The year 2010 marks the 85<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Ukrainian National Women's League of America, Inc. (UNWLA), the largest and oldest Ukrainian women's organization in the United States, which works independently as a charitable and cultural organization .

The UNWLA was established in 1925 by five existing Ukrainian women's associations in New York City and vicinity following the exclusion of the National Council of Women (NCW) of Ukraine from the International Council of Women. The NCW of Ukraine had been a member of the ICW since 1920, but was excluded from the ICW as a direct result of Ukraine's loss of national independence, a prerequisite for ICW membership. This centralized organization was named Soyuz Ukrainok Ameryky - Ukrainian National Women's League of America, Inc. - and its goal was to inform the free world about events in Ukraine, to support the homeland both spiritually and materially, and to promote the preservation of Ukrainian national identity, cultural heritage, and ethnic traditions in the United States.

Today's UNWLA members are continuing this mission as it applies to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It has become customary to celebrate our anniversaries by implementing new and meaningful social service projects. Five years ago, the project “Milk and Roll for our youngest students” or “Moloko i Bulochka” was established to commemorate our 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. This project has been discontinued because the Ukrainian government now provides breakfast in the schools.

On the eve of the 85<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our organization we have turned our efforts to helping the elderly, an often neglected group of the population, by lending needed assistance to selected nursing homes in various regions (oblasts) of Ukraine. We aptly named our project “Assistance and Caring for the Elderly.” It is noteworthy that nursing homes, which were virtually unknown in Ukraine before World War II, are now overflowing. The economic crisis is serious and exacerbates the problem.

Through the efforts of the UNWLA Executive Board and our Social Welfare Chair Iryna Rudyk, contacts with institutions for the elderly in Ukraine have been established. As a result, each Regional Council of the UNWLA (of which there are nine) and a 10<sup>th</sup> group comprising Branches-at-Large, has been assigned a geriatric home which will benefit from their generosity.

Phase 1 of our project involves “Mission Outreach,” a not-for-profit organization focused on the recovery and responsible redistribution of healthcare equipment and supplies to developing countries. It is administered in exemplary fashion by the Hospital Sisters of St. Francis. Mission Outreach supported our initiative wholeheartedly and contributed articles of daily necessity for the homes of the elderly in Ukraine. After weeks of a tedious selection process by phone and Internet, armed with passwords and a variety of other names and numbers, this portion of our humanitarian aid project has finally come to fruition.

Because Mission Outreach is located in the Chicago area, three members of the National Board of the UNWLA—President Marianna Zajac, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President Ulana Zynych, and Social Welfare

Chair Iryna Rudyk—traveled to the Windy City to help with the packing and oversight of the final stage of this phase. (December 3-December 5)



In an enormous warehouse near Midway Airport, we were met by our Guardian Angel from Mission Outreach and 10 volunteers, members from the Chicago Regional Council. They worked so very diligently and cheerfully that I must include their names: Olena Charkewych, Oresta Fedyniak, Oksana Jackiw, Olenka Pryjma, Eugenia Byskosh, Kristine Sobol, Kristine Dzuk, Eva Zelenko, Luba Nowak and Vasyl Shcherbyuk. Pan Vasyl deserves special

mention. Since his wife, Maria was unable to attend, he took her place and we commend him for his contribution.

Together we packed and repacked over 4,000 pounds of donated items, including wheelchairs, walkers, canes, bed linen, disposable and reusable personal hygiene items, socks and stockings (including anti-emboli stockings), and various other items that had been requested by the nursing homes. The packing list was pages and pages in length. With only a short meal break, we completed our goal. We were all tired, but it was a good tired—knowing that maybe we will touch a life; knowing that we might bring a smile to an elderly person’s face.



Paul Shaluga from Meest Chicago Shipping of Lombard, Il came to assess this “sea” of boxes and share suggestions for packing since Meest was in charge of shipping.

The only financial responsibility to be addressed by the Regional Councils during this phase was Mission Outreach’s handling costs and the cost of shipping to Ukraine.

Following Phase 1, each Regional Council will be dealing directly with its assigned institution.



The further success of “Assistance and Caring for the Elderly” will depend on the independent work of Regional Councils and their Branches with their respective homes for the elderly. Their creativity and commitment and cooperative spirit will dictate the progress of the project.

All Regional Councils have been provided with the necessary contact information, such as phone numbers of the directors of the respective geriatric homes. They also have contact information for a member of Soyuz Ukrainok in the corresponding oblast who will coordinate the program and ensure its proper implementation on the local level. She will also function as a liaison between the nursing home and our Regional Council.

We've put together a comprehensive plan and have the great desire and commitment to help as the need arises.

Thank you to all our volunteers.

Please feel free to search for more information about the UNWLA on our Website: [www.UNWLA.org](http://www.UNWLA.org) or we invite you to subscribe to *Our Life*, the UNWLA's official publication.

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