

Local resident's family supporting Ukrainians

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While the devastating impacts of the conflict in Ukraine can feel like a world away, one Shelburne resident's family members are doing what they can to provide support to refugees arriving in Poland.

Ewa Kotwas, owner of Jelly Craft Bakery, says she is proud of her son, Paul Kotwas, and other family members in Poland as they open up their homes to Ukrainian refugees fleeing the war.

"He's doing what's right," she said in an interview with the Free Press.

Originally from Poland, in an area close to the Lithuanian border, Kotwas moved to Canada over 35 years ago after initially visiting. Her son Paul, a graduate of Centre Dufferin District High School (CDDHS), moved to Poland for a master's program at Kozminski University in Warsaw and chose to stay.

Speaking with the Free Press, Kotwas shared that her son had helped house a mother with a seven-week-old baby as she attempted to make her way to Germany, and her niece was housing a mother with three children in her apartment.

According to the UN, as of March 8, more than 2 million people have fled Ukraine because of the Russian invasion, with Poland taking in the largest numbers at over 1.2 million.

While proud of her family, Kotwas told the Free Press she is also scared for them.

"My whole family is there and I don't know if they'll be next. I asked my son to come back home, but he wants to stay and my hearts with him. My brother said he has to fight and be there for what our mother and father built," said Kotwas.

Residents across Dufferin County have been raising donations from money to clothes to food and medical supplies to help support Ukrainians.

Kotwas said she would like to hold a fundraiser at some point for Ukraine such as giving out free coffees for donations.

"My family is helping out and I'm waiting because I want to find a way to send money to people who really need [it] not just a big organization," said Kotwas.