

# Ukrainian family finds refuge in Piedmont

By Kirk Miller and Michael Barber

Alex Putrenkov, his wife Maryna and their seven-year-old son, Vlad, recently set out on an unimaginable journey. On April 1, they gathered a few personal belongings, stuffed them into a couple of suitcases and left their war-torn home in the Donbass region of Ukraine to make a new life in America.

“The military operations (in Ukraine) were drawing out all the resources.” Alex said. “As long as the country is at war, it cannot be prosperous and does not offer a good future. It is simply too dangerous to live there.”

The family drove from Crimea to Moscow, then to Lithuania and on to Warsaw, Poland before flying to Paris, Madrid and Mexico City. They arrived in Tijuana on April 11 at the same time the Piedmont Community Church Mexico house-building mission was taking place.

Church member Scott Willis was onsite in Tijuana helping Piedmont students and adult leaders tackle the task of building 12 homes for families in need. Willis is also the chair of the church’s Refugee Task Force, a group that has helped settle families from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Syria.

Willis made contact with the family through a former Mexico mission participant, Jenny Miller-Feinberg, who works for Bayer, Inc. Alex’s brother, who also works for Bayer, had posted on the company’s intranet bulletin board the need for housing for his brother and family who were already on their way to the U.S.

Piedmont Community Church members Bob and Judy Wright obtained plane tickets for the family to fly to Oakland, and Kirk and Christina Miller, Jenny’s parents, met them at the airport on April 13 and offered to host the family on an ongoing basis.

“Of course, we calmed down when we got to Piedmont,” Alex said. “We are finally in a safe place where we can feel comfortable, but at the same time, we are worried about our parents and loved ones who stayed in our city. We have feelings of anxiety.”

While they are now physically secure, Maryna finds the current situation emotionally difficult.

“I have relatives still in



Photo by Michael Barber

Alex Putrenkov, his wife Maryna and their seven-year-old son, Vlad pose for a family photo taken in the courtyard of Piedmont Community Church after attending services on April 24.

Ukraine who I miss,” Maryna said. “I understand that there is no future in my country, but my heart is there, and I ache for those places, and for the people left there.”

Vlad, the couple’s son, has already begun attending Wildwood School and is adapting nicely.

“I thought that it would be much more difficult for Vlad to be in this school since he does not understand English,” Maryna said. “Surprisingly, he feels good and goes to school in a good mood. He likes his new teacher, who he says is kinder than the teacher he had in Ukraine.”

In addition to sharpening their English-speaking skills and learning the rules of the Bay Area roads, Alex and Maryna are seeking employment. They will require the services of an immi-

gration attorney to file the necessary paperwork to obtain jobs. Alex was trained as a mechanical engineer and worked in agriculture, while Maryna worked in accounting.

Piedmont Church is asking for donations through their website, [PiedmontChurch.org](http://PiedmontChurch.org), to help with legal fees and transitioning.

“We are infinitely grateful to people and the church that helps us at the moment,” Alex said.

Last week, Vlad told his parents that the children in his new class treat him well.

“He brought home a postcard from a classmate who expressed his feelings,” Maryna said. “He wants to be friends with him.”

To donate to the Piedmont Community Church Refugee Task Force, visit [PiedmontChurch.org](http://PiedmontChurch.org) and click ‘Giving.’

## PIEDMONT FOURTH OF JULY PARADE

### Entry Form – 2022

We hope your group will be a part of this year’s 4th of July Parade in Piedmont. This year’s parade theme is **Remember Why It’s the Fourth of July.**

The parade will take place on Highland Avenue starting at 11 a.m. on Monday, July 4.

As a reminder, candy may be handed out on the parade route but not thrown from vehicles.

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Phone: Day \_\_\_\_\_

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Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

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Group description: (*# of people, vehicles, music, etc.*)

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Special needs: (*problems with hills, turning corners, parade placement, etc.*)

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