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For Immediate Release

Volunteer Group Rebuilds Homes and Lives in Wake of War

Group is funded by Nova Ukraine in San Francisco

San Francisco, CA — The neighbors refer to her as a local good witch. Like Baba Yaga from Slavic fairy tales, she rolls eggs on plates to tell fortunes, warns of diseases, and removes evil marks. After the Russian invasion, however, Galina Stepanivna did more than tell fortunes. She cooked for Ukrainian soldiers fighting in one of the war’s fiercest battles in the village of Moshchun, north of Bucha.

When artillery fire hit her home, Stepanivna was hiding in the cellar. The roof of the house collapsed and a shockwave threw her across the room. She survived but others did not. “A boy was torn to pieces so bad, only his leg was found,” she said. Stepanivna and her husband fled.

On March 21 Ukrainian forces liberated Moshchun. Stepanivna returned to find all her belongings gone and her home in ruin. She asked the authorities for help and was told they will rebuild — but only after the end of the war.

“But where do we live until then?” she asked. “In a dog house?”

Fortunately for Stepanivna, rescue came — but not from the government. A volunteer crew of construction workers, funded by the San Francisco-based nonprofit Nova Ukraine, go home to home, assessing the damage and rebuilding homes. They call themselves “Helping Hand” and work in villages and cities in the outskirts of Kyiv, such as Bucha, Irpin, Moshchun, and Gostomel.

“In Moshchun, not a single building was left standing,” said Sergey Stetch, a small business owner who founded the group. “It’s a small village of 250 buildings, nearly all

of them totaled. People cannot evacuate forever. They dream of coming home but they return to ashes.”

Construction work is not all Helping Hand does. After Ukrainian forces liberated Bucha Helping Hand became the first volunteer group to enter this city. “What I saw will leave a deep mark on me for life,” recalls Stetch. “A formerly peaceful town with bright life, now in ruins, strewn with the bodies of the dead. But we have no right to lose heart or give up.”

Helping Hand removes debris and alerts authorities to unexploded ordnance not removed by the military. They also supply food through field kitchens and restore generator power.

The need for assistance far outpaces Helping Hand’s ability to provide it. In particular, the volunteers need heavy equipment such as cranes, bulldozers and excavators. Local companies refuse to lease this equipment due to the risk of damage from explosives.

Nova Ukraine is looking for donations of lumber, construction materials, and heavy equipment.

Full interview with Sergey Stetch [here](#).

[About Nova Ukraine](#)

[Nova Ukraine](#) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing humanitarian aid to Ukraine and strengthening the country’s democracy.