

Mono resident leaves for Ukraine to provide aid

By **Sam Odrowski**

The horrifying images of war stemming from the Russia invasion of Ukraine has led a local business owner to travel to the region to provide humanitarian aid.

Mono resident Nishan Kooner, who owns 10 and 10 Garden Centre, has been following the conflict since it started in late February and said he can no longer watch from afar.

‘I see hundreds of thousands or millions of people and animals suffering because of the decisions of very few people,’ said Kooner. ‘I’m seeing animal shelters being abandoned with 100 or 200 dogs, or even animal shelters where one or two [people] stay behind and their hydro’s being lost, and their pipes are freezing, and they can’t get food for the animals.

‘The animals didn’t really do anything. They just exist, and because they exist, they’re going to suffer,’ he added.

Kooner said 10 and 10 Garden Centre supports animal rescue organizations locally and seeing that the situation is more desperate in the Ukraine, he felt compelled to provide assistance.

‘We’re just switching our focus basically from rescues here to rescues there,’ he noted.

Kooner told the Citizen he doesn’t agree with war and isn’t going there to fight, instead he plans to bring pet food and other supplies to animals and people in need.

‘Since it started, I’ve been following it, hoping it will end, hoping there’ll be peace, that there’ll be a humanitarian corridor or something... and nothing happened. It’s only getting worse, so it just came to the point where I couldn’t really watch anymore,’ he said.

‘I wasn’t sleeping, I wasn’t eating properly; I was very stressed and emotional. I wasn’t conducting business properly, so it came to a point I just had to [book my flight], I felt obligated to go. I needed to go. There’s really no other explanation.’

Kooner caught a flight to London last night, March 16, and today he’s making his way into France, where he’ll road trip to Hungary before reaching Ukraine.

A trailer will be hitched to his vehicle, which will be filled supplies to give to the people of Ukraine.

The trailer will also be used to transport people and animals out of Ukraine when he exits the country. Supplies are at the border of Ukraine in Poland, so Kooner will be travelling back and forth to get resources to those in need.

‘Our main goal is to get pet food and pet items into the country,’ said Kooner. ‘People are donating millions of dollars’ worth of stuff, but there [are] very few people to actually transport it into the country. So, a lot of it is in warehouses, and people just don’t really have access to what’s being donated.’

Kooner is in contact with several humanitarian organizations such as Red Cross, which is transporting supplies into Ukraine, as well as Doctors Without Borders. He plans on connecting with other volunteers who he’ll be working with to provide aid.

‘I don’t intend to go into a warzone, we will try to stay as safe as possible. The entire country is not safe, but there are some areas that are obviously less safe than others,’ Kooner noted. ‘Our goal is purely humanitarian: get people and animals supplies.’

Kooner's family worries for his well-being, going to an active war in Ukraine, but are supportive of his mission to provide humanitarian aid.

He told the Citizen his wife is very into animal rescues and would be with him if they didn't have to take care of their garden centre business and other responsibilities here at home.

Kooner is running an online fundraiser where donations will be distributed to various humanitarian and animal rescue groups such as the Red Cross for Ukraine. Some of the funds will be given directly to be people fleeing the war by Kooner, and the remaining portion of donations will go towards equipment used in the defense of Ukraine.

?If this [conflict] ever happens in our home, we would all beg the world to help us, and we would expect help,? he said. ?These people are no different than us. They need assistance on a global scale, and anybody with the means to do so should help.?

For updates on Kooner's trip, watch the 10 and 10 Garden Centre Facebook Page: www.facebook.com/10and10GC.