

Mono resident returning to Ukraine to continue helping animals

By **Sam Odrowski**

A local man is continuing his efforts to rescue as many animals as possible from shelled areas in Ukraine.

Owner of 10 and 10 Garden Centre, Nishan Kooner, was operating out of the Ukraine and Romania border, transporting supplies to animal shelters and rescuing pets from ones that have been abandoned.

Kooner arrived in Ukraine in mid-March and spent two weeks there before returning to Mono early last week to help prepare the 10 and 10 Garden Centre for the spring season.

During that time, he helped save over 1,000 animals, which were mostly cats and dogs, but he also assisted with rescuing a lion, grizzly bear, foxes, and wolves from Kiev Zoo.

"The bear was a dancing and performing bear, so its life was not a nice life," he said. "It wasn't treated well, but now we've gotten it out of Ukraine and he is at an animal sanctuary, so all that's behind him. He's in a better place and he's being taken care of."

Kooner, meanwhile, caught a flight heading back to Ukraine yesterday to continue supporting animals in need.

"I'll be going to some of the cities that are now free of war, but weren't a few weeks ago," he said. "Some of the cities that were hit pretty hard, we'll need to go in and help animal shelters and people in search and rescue and all that kind of stuff."

Kooner's going to be working with a sanctuary in Romania called Laika Animal Rescue to transport animals out of areas that have been attacked by Russian forces but have since been cleared.

He said there's a lot of places that were active war zones and inaccessible last time he was in Ukraine, so those areas will be the focus for rescue and resupply missions.

When speaking with the Citizen shortly after his return from Ukraine, Kooner said his time spent overseas gave him perspective and furthered his gratitude for being Canadian.

"You feel a lot more purpose out there," he said. "There's a lot of things you take for granted until you visit a country where ? especially during war, but even without war ? they don't have the security, the infrastructure and the quality of life that we have here."

Kooner added that the most impactful part of his trip was each time animals were transported across the Romania border into safety.

"That's the best feeling for me? actually physically getting these animals out of Ukraine," he noted.

The local community, meanwhile, has been rallying behind Kooner since he announced that he would be travelling to Ukraine to provide aid.

To date, more than \$10,000 has been raised through an online fundraiser and just under \$8,000

was raised through a silent auction held April 2 and 3.

The funds help with the purchase of equipment and supplies for rescuing animals.

To make a donation, visit: shorturl.at/hGMU0

Kooner plans to return from Ukraine on May 1 to be at 10 and 10 Garden Centre for the spring rush.

A few 10 and 10 Garden Centre customers who have been following Kooner's journey have been inspired to volunteer in Ukraine themselves.

They plan to work with an animal shelter in Romania where animals are being transported from Ukraine.

Follow 10 and 10 Garden Centre on social media to stay up to date with Kooner's efforts in Ukraine:
facebook.com/10and10gardencentre.