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Amid war, BI man takes on humanitarian mission

By [Nancy Treder](#) • March 30, 2022 10:54 am

A refugee center in Poland. Courtesy Photo

Dale Perry couldn't sleep.

Perry and his wife, Carol, were on what they hoped would be a restful vacation in French Polynesia. But half a world away, Russian troops were amassing along the Ukraine border.

As co-owner of Energy Resources of Ukraine, a Kyiv-based company that supplies Ukraine with liquefied natural gas, Perry's growing concern for 30 employees there caused him to cut his February vacation short.

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Worried about losing communications with his company, he encouraged his business partner, Yaroslav, to set up offices outside Ukrainian borders while urging his employees to flee to countries that didn't require visas.

"I was really trying to encourage our people to get out of there," Perry said.

Perry returned to Bainbridge Island, where he's lived with his family since 2009. He then flew to Poland to meet a U.S. shipment of liquefied natural gas bound for Ukraine at a terminal in the northern city of Świnoujście. Then he met with bankers in Poland and Austria to handle financial matters outside of Ukraine and keep the business going.

Thankfully, internet and cell towers were still working, and he was in communication with his people in Ukraine.

On Feb. 27, Perry traveled to the southernmost border crossing in Krościenko, Poland, to meet two of his employees who had crossed the border. "It's in a valley in the mountains with a river running right next to it, and it's very, very tight," Perry said, comparing it in size to Lynwood Center.

He said it reminded him of Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, where he was raised.

Imagine up to 8,000 people flowing through there every day with nothing more than they can carry. "Everybody's funneling through one lane of traffic with only one sidewalk, and it's heart-wrenching because every moment you're there, women and children are walking right by," Perry said.

The fleeing employees told of desperate conditions, trudging through freezing temperatures along the 15-kilometer-long line of refugees to reach safety.

It was then that Perry started forming a relief plan. As the world watched the Russian army invade Ukraine, forcing more than 3 million people to flee into Central Europe and beyond, Perry and his partner were determined to do what they could.

They shifted their business toward humanitarian relief, having the resources, connections, a shopping list and people to help.

Perry knew they had the ability to send food and supplies across the border, and his employees knew what to buy: tents, sleeping bags, air mattresses, food, diapers and medical kits.

Together, Perry and Yaroslav each pledged \$1 million of their money to piece together a supply chain.

"We are good at putting puzzles together," Perry said.

For 35 years, Perry has been working in the energy sector, solving problems in that part of the world and fighting corruption. After the Revolution of Dignity in 2014, entrepreneurs realized they could start a business without paying bribes, so he and Yaroslav decided to start something, and "eight years later,

we've had more success than we've ever dreamed of.”

That success and love for Ukraine is what drives them to help.

In Kyiv, the finance team continued to work. “We were running our business from a bomb shelter,” Perry said.

They would pop up out of the basement of the apartment building, get WiFi, send a wire transfer and go back down again. They are literally guarding the apartment building with AK-47s. The new mission gave everyone structure and something to focus on.

“It’s surreal the way business continues on. Staying involved in business helps psychologically, especially for the people in Kyiv,” Perry said.

The puzzle pieces of the supply chain came together quickly. “We found somebody in a city two hours from the border who was willing to open up his warehouse on a Sunday. We had the resources to convince him to release those products to us and put it in a van. He actually went shopping for items with his own family members to fill the larger vans.”

They found people with vehicles to transport goods to the border, and a border guard to allow the truck drivers into “no man’s land,” where Yaroslav oversaw the transfer of supplies to Ukraine trucks.

“We put all the steps together,” said Perry, who drove one of the trucks the first night when up to \$300,000 worth of goods were delivered into Ukraine.

The quick action of Perry getting supplies across the border helped thousands of men, women and children survive their harrowing escape to Poland.

From their home, Carol handled media calls, coordinated donations and managed the family’s Foundation for Equity and Justice. In Boston, their daughter, Rachel, created a fundraising website, www.aid-for-ukraine.org, and updated it daily with photos, videos and messages from her dad.

When the international non-government organizations began arriving, Perry sought to pass off his distribution model to a larger relief agency, and he ended up in daily briefings with the U.S. Army’s 82nd Airborne Division in Rzeszow, Poland, where the European Union, United Nations and humanitarian agencies were organizing.

The big question on Perry’s mind was, “Why didn’t the U.N., NATO or U.S. offer help sooner?” After all, the United States attempted to predict day-by-day when the invasion was going to happen, they emptied out the embassy and rushed off to a different city.

“But nobody thought to fly in a few airplanes of relief. I just feel that was a huge failure to prepare,” Perry said.

His efforts made a big impact.

“The very first day I was there, I realized we put more money and more products into Ukraine than all the humanitarian aid organizations,” Perry said.

In the first 10 days of the conflict, the team delivered close to \$2 million in relief into Ukraine, and they posted videos, photos and spreadsheets of their purchases.

Perry offered to explain his process to everybody there, but only one person, an American brigadier general, wanted to know what he'd done.

Perry showed him a map and described the process: leg one procured things from the U.S. into Krakow or Rzeszow; leg two was where trucks moved the items into "no man's land" at the border and transferred them from Polish trucks to Ukrainian trucks; leg three moved the cargo over the border into Ukraine; and leg four was made up of drivers ready to haul the supplies long distance to where they were needed.

The general asked Perry, "Were you in logistics in the military?" And that's when Perry told him that he was a Navy veteran who had served six years on fast-attack submarines and ended his Naval service as a lieutenant in Bremerton.

"Now, I understand why you're crazy," Perry quoted the general as saying. "And I think you might even be doing the right thing."

At that point, Perry was looking to pass off his distribution model to an NGO. "They went on a trial run with us, and they've contracted with the same Polish companies that we've worked with. But their focus is medical supplies, and it's hard to find those right now."

After all of Perry's employees who wanted to leave were out of Ukraine, and the UN started moving supplies, he decided to return home to spend time with family and plan for the future.

"We've got enough people and a system in place that I don't have to actually be part of this. Put it this way, they no longer need me to drive a truck," Perry said.

Carol emphasized that her husband is not walking away from his commitment and will ensure that all the money raised during fundraising will go toward more supplies distributed in Ukraine.

The Foundation for Equity and Justice is a private 501(c)(3) nonprofit and, as of March 28, had received more than \$695,000 in donations. Perry's team delivers up to \$50,000 in food to provide up to 100,000 meals per day.

"Our plan has been to spend what they could by procuring locally, and then hopefully identify an NGO on the ground doing this good work," but it's been difficult to identify an NGO with low overhead expenses.

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"When Dale's team learned that most NGOs have a minimal 17 percent-plus administration expenses, they became determined to continue sourcing goods on their own while they can, so Ukrainians can literally eat what would otherwise go to pay overhead if the money is given to an NGO," said Carol.

The Foundation for Equity and Justice does not have any overhead costs, and the Perrys pay currency exchange fees in order to ensure that every dollar donated is spent on relief supplies.

The Perrys are scrupulous stewards of donations received through the Aid For Ukraine fundraiser (aid-for-ukraine.org) and are transparent about the relief efforts. Videos, photos and updates submitted by the team show the supplies purchased and sent to Ukraine.

As the crisis continues, the Perrys are encouraging people to continue to give to causes they believe in and “to help people who are on the ground,” like Dmitry and Anastasia Voloshenko, who are delivering food and supplies to people in Mykolaiv, Ukraine (www.gofundme.com/f/mykolaiv).

His company is still committed to supporting Ukraine.

“They’re working as hard at this as they worked at building our business. They’re just business people who happen to be working in an aid organization for a while,” Perry said.



A truck with 18 tons of food including; dry soups, baby food, dry milk, sugar, salt, water, juices and medical bandages destined for Ukraine. Courtesy Photo



Courtesy Photo Babies in Ukraine receive a supply of food and diapers from Perry's team.

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