

# HOMETOWN HUB

GREENSBORO  
LAKE JEANETTE  
OAK RIDGE  
STOKESDALE  
SUMMERFIELD

Your neighbors. Your news.

Submit news about your neighborhood, houses of worship, schools, sporting events, business groups or clubs via e-mail to [hometownhubs@news-record.com](mailto:hometownhubs@news-record.com) To share feedback or ideas about your Hometown Hub section, contact Annette Ayres at [aayres@news-record.com](mailto:aayres@news-record.com).



MARCH 7, 2007

FOR MORE NEWS ABOUT GUILFORD COMMUNITIES, VISIT [GUILFORDRECORD.COM/NORTH](http://GUILFORDRECORD.COM/NORTH)

## Ukraine mission leads to help for troubled children

BY MARK KOEHLER  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

My story begins in 1998 in Greensboro.

Through everyday circumstances, I was introduced to the Hebrew Immigration Aid Society. I was immediately interested in helping the post-Soviet Jewish refugees move into their homes and adjust to life in America. The first family I helped was from Croatia. Also, I met families from Moldova, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Russia.

During the next two years, I learned many things about these people, their past and their hopes for the future. They told me about the difficult lives they had lived under communism, and they wore the pain on their faces of the friendships left behind. As I heard their stories, a deep love for these people began to burn in my heart.

In 2000, I traveled to St. Petersburg, Russia. Nine months

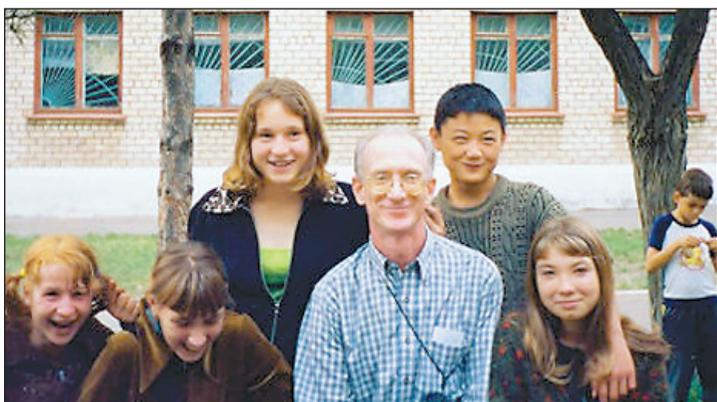
later, I visited Odessa, Ukraine. I came to understand the true hardships the people were facing about 10 years after communism ended in Ukraine.

God opened my heart to my future. He put such a passion in my heart that I finally understood my purpose in life. He was calling me to take this love that lay dormant in my heart and pour it into the lives of the children of Ukraine.

This was the beginning of my life as a missionary. My original vision was to feed the homeless children in Odessa.

I had to believe that if God had called me, he would provide everything I needed. I knew just one person in Ukraine. I knew nothing about how to become a missionary and had no experience in fundraising. As God opened a door, I would walk through. I walked through about eight major doors that God had opened for me. Each led me

SEE UKRAINE, PAGE 9



COURTESY OF MARK KOEHLER

Mark Koehler with children from the orphanage in Marganets, Ukraine.



JOE REDDING/SPECIAL TO GUILFORD RECORD

Augusta Johnston shows off her harmonica to friends in the AHOY program at Lawndale Baptist Church.

## Senior citizen still playing a lively harmonica tune

Every Monday, Wednesday and Friday morning, at least 40 senior citizens head for Lawndale Baptist Church. There, in the comfortable carpeted fellowship hall, they march, kick, bend and wave their arms in a vigorous 45-minute aerobic routine.

This free AHOY program, sponsored and led by personnel from the Greensboro Recreation Department, helps keep countless Guilford County residents, age 55 and older, fit, toned and heart-healthy.

One of the participants, petite Augusta Johnston, wearing bright red lipstick and nodding hello, bounces through the door 10 minutes before class. Now 74, she still possesses a personality radiant enough to make you believe that a fountain of youth must surely exist.



SANDRA  
Redding

And why is she always so cheerful? "It's just my nature," she says. "I grew up in a family that always tried to see the bright side. As children, my brothers and I enjoyed telling puns."

In addition to a ready smile, Augusta has another treat for her AHOY friends. Taking a small harmonica from her workout bag, she asks those gathered around her, "Does anyone have a tune they'd like me to play?"

Make any request and she will attempt to play it, and if you dare sing along, that will delight her even more.

Music has long been

Augusta's passion. She surmises that it might be inherited. Her paternal grandfather was the music supervisor for the public schools in the state of Maryland. "My father sang tenor," she reveals, "and my mother played the piano."

Following their musical path, Augusta could pick out tunes on the piano by age 6. "I suppose I had a good ear," she says.

Augusta laughs and then relates her disastrous first public performance.

One afternoon, while her family lived in Winston-Salem, she accompanied her father in a recital. They had carefully practiced "Carry Me Back to Ole Virginny," Augusta playing piano as her father sang. That night, nervous and intent on

SEE REDDING, PAGE 11

## UKRAINE

Continued from Page 6

to an answer to one of my many questions.

My second year of preparation to move to Ukraine was accompanied by a peace beyond all comprehension.

It lasted a year.

This was the ultimate confirmation that it was truly God's calling and not some wild idea.

The final door opened one week before I was to leave. A woman I had met only once, who had been reading my newsletters and knew I was preparing to move to Ukraine, asked if I would take \$5,000 to give to a church in Illichevsk, Ukraine. She had been raising money for the church and church camp in a neighboring village. This was how I was introduced to Victor and the church in Illichevsk, which runs the Emmaus Food Program and the camp in Sanzjaka. These would become a part of my future outreach work.

After I moved to Ukraine in May 2002, I went with my friend in Odessa to visit her parents in Marganets, about 230 miles east northeast. Her father was anxious to show me the orphanage. When I left the orphanage, I was in tears. My heart was broken for these children. The bleak surroundings, dark hallways, and buildings in disrepair were disheartening. But it was the empty look in the eyes of the children that touched the deepest part of my emotion.

Returning to Odessa, I delivered the money to Victor. He invited me to visit his city for two weeks and be a guest at his home. I became attached to the Emmaus Food Program that his church operates.

These children were looking for someone to reach out to them. During my brief encounter, it was difficult to understand much about the children. All I knew was that they were from "difficult" homes.

After missionary school, I settled in Illichevsk. I lived with Victor's family for three months, then rented an apartment. As I put my life together, learning how to shop and cook Ukrainian style and get around town, I was unaware of how my body was reacting to all of the changes in my life. By December of 2003, I was one big knot. I could hardly turn my head. I began to look for professional help to relieve my pain.

Upon finding a massage therapist, I had eight days of therapy and excellent relief. I inquired if massage therapy could help my



COURTESY BY MARK KOEHLER

**Mark Koehler visited Ukraine for the first time in 2000 and moved there in May 2002. He later started Mission Children's Hope ([www.muchhope.org](http://www.muchhope.org)), a nonprofit organization based in Greensboro.**

problem with muscle dominance in my left side, a form of cerebral palsy. After three months of intensive therapy, again I received great results.

At this point, God put upon my heart to share this treatment with the children of Illichevsk with disabilities.

My therapist jumped at the chance to work with children. This was the beginning of the massage clinic for children with disabilities.

That was March 2004. As more people became aware of my mission and the mission grew, Mission Ukraine Children's Hope ([www.muchhope.org](http://www.muchhope.org)), a nonprofit organization based in Greensboro, was formed in May 2004. The mission is guided by a board of directors.

From July 2002 until present, the Marganets Orphanage and the Emmaus Food Program have received monthly contributions. Here are some of the ways that we are changing the lives of the children.

At the Emmaus Food Program, we:

- Improved the quality of food served to the children.

- Remodeled a pantry to be a bathroom and shower. Some children do not have hot water in their homes. Others have not been taught about cleanliness.

- Provided materials for the sewing club. Plans include a college transportation scholarship program, a computer lab, and tools for boys to learn to work with wood, metal and other materials.

At the Marganets Orphanage, we:

- Provide clothing and shoes each month.

- Provided two small wash-

ing machines and an amplifier system early in 2003.

- Replaced 142 beds and bedding. This has brightened their environment and improved their self images.

- Created an inhalation clinic to reduce illness during the cold season.

- Provided toys for each child during Christmas 2006.

- Will work on buying library books and sports equipment, providing new services in their computer lab and beginning massage therapy for the children most in need.

The massage clinic in

Illichevsk is operating 10-hour days, 20 days a month. The results are amazing. To see the results, visit our Web site and read some back issues of my newsletters.

We expect to serve 50 children a year. Two extensions of this outreach are the development of a park and a camp program for the disabled.

It has been an incredible journey so far. God has done marvelous things here in Ukraine through MUCH and the teams that support each ministry. Family and friends first believed in my vision and encouraged me with financial and prayer support that made it possible to begin and maintain each of these outreach ministries. Others joined in to be a part of one or more of the many teams that touch the lives of our children in Ukraine.

To learn more about my work in Ukraine, contact me at [markk-ua@triad.rr.com](mailto:markk-ua@triad.rr.com) or visit the MUCH web site at [www.muchhope.org](http://www.muchhope.org).

*Mark Koehler works in field operations for Mission Ukraine Children's Hope, a nonprofit organization based in Greensboro.*



## With Flooring So Stylish, Who Needs Furniture?

232 north main street  
burlington, nc 27217  
p: 336.227.8801  
[www.theplywoodstore.com](http://www.theplywoodstore.com)  
mon-fri 8-5, sat 9-1



**The Plywood Store**  
of Burlington, Inc.

"great floors. begin here."