

SISTER CITY RELATIONSHIP

Annual Report 2024

Milwaukee and Irpin, Ukraine signed a formal Sister City agreement to foster friendship and collaboration between the two municipalities on March 15, 2018.

Anya Verkhovskaya

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Milwaukee, USA



Irpin, Ukraine



Organization



Sister City Relationship Annual Report*

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PERSON IN CHARGE OF ORGANIZATION FOR MILWAUKEE		
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SISTER CITY		
Name: Irpin	Country: Ukraine	Population: 60 084
PERSON IN CHARGE OF ORGANIZATION FOR SISTER CITY		
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Updated information about the sister city:

Areas of mutual interest and involvement between Milwaukee and Irpin in the areas of culture and business:

- Culture:
- Arts and Music Exchange
 - Language and Education Programs
 - Culinary Exchange and Food Festivals
 - Historical Preservation and Heritage Promotion
 - Community Engagement through Cultural Events
- Business:
- Trade and Investment Opportunities
 - Entrepreneurship and Innovation Collaboration
 - Tourism and Hospitality Promotion
 - Sustainable Development Initiatives
 - Networking and Business Events

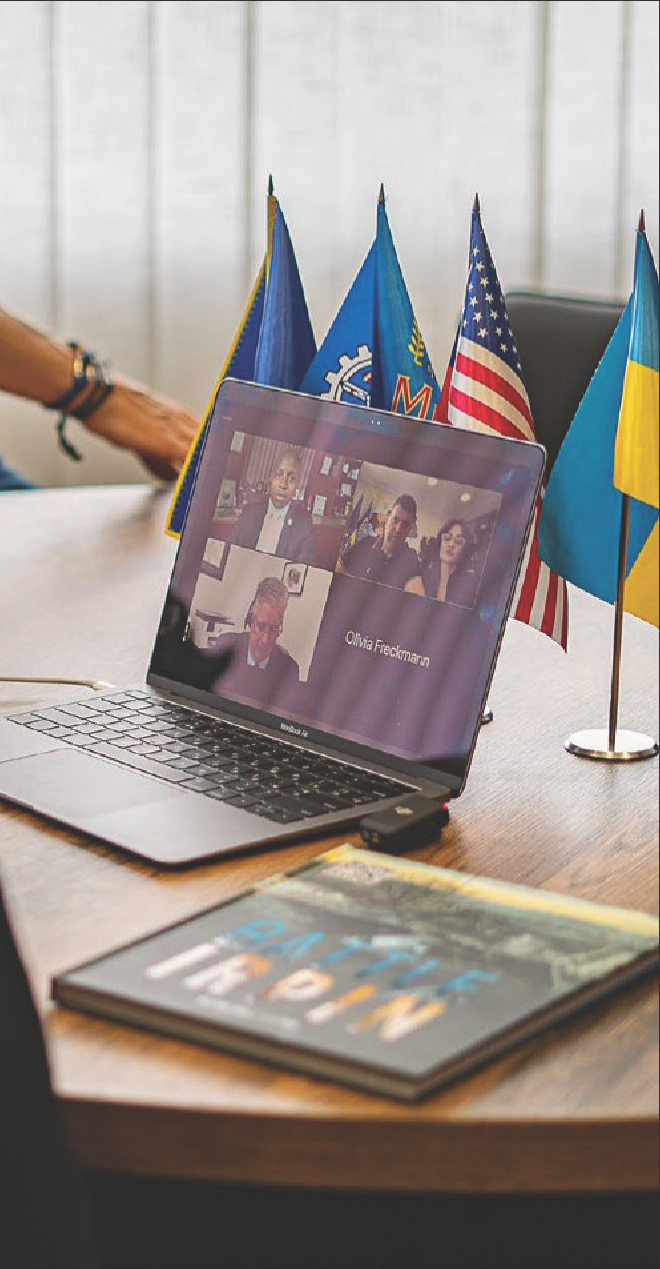
Intro


“I mentioned before, and it remains to be true today, that Milwaukee, the state of Wisconsin, the United States, and folks around the world, have found a renewed sense of patriotism because of the work that you and so many Ukrainians have done over the past year defending your homeland against the Russian invasion,”

— Mayor Cavalier Johnson

Annual Report 2024

This annual report outlines the progress made in expanding cultural, educational, and community connections between Milwaukee and Irpin, highlighting the collective efforts that have brought our cities closer together. As we reflect on the year's achievements, we look forward to continued collaboration, deeper cultural appreciation, and shared growth in the years to come.





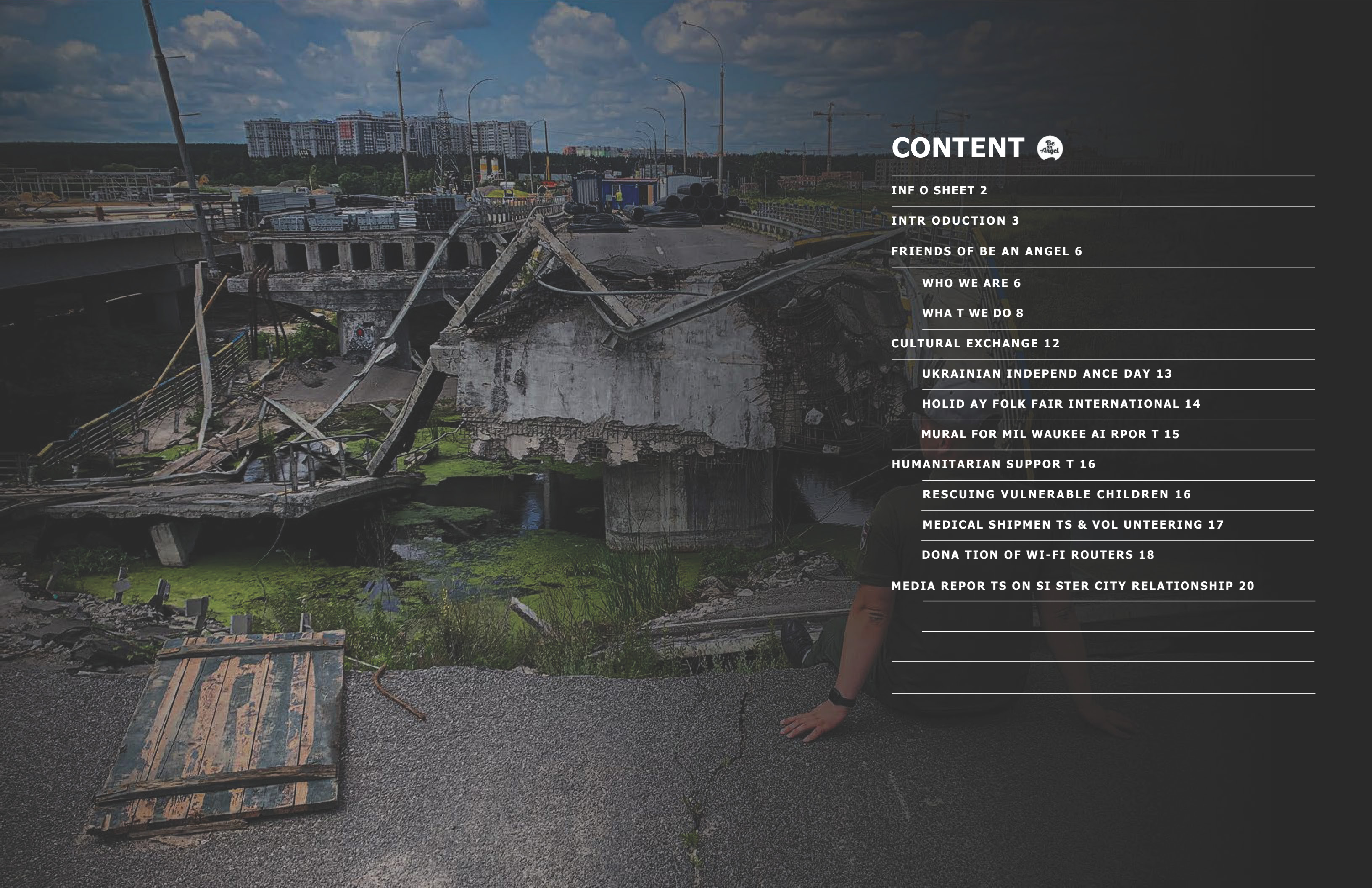
City of Milwaukee

Cavalier Johnson took office as acting Mayor of the city of Irpin in 2021.



City of Irpin

Oleksandr Markushin took office as acting Mayor of the city of Irpin in 2020.



CONTENT

INF O SHEET 2
INTR ODUCTION 3
FRIENDS OF BE AN ANGEL 6
WHO WE ARE 6
WHA T WE DO 8
CULTURAL EXCHANGE 12
UKRAINIAN INDEPEND ANCE DAY 13
HOLID AY FOLK FAIR INTERNATIONAL 14
MURAL FOR MIL WAUKEE AI RPOR T 15
HUMANITARIAN SUPPOR T 16
RESCUING VULNERABLE CHILDREN 16
MEDICAL SHIPMEN TS & VOL UNTEERING 17
DONA TION OF WI-FI ROUTERS 18
MEDIA REPOR TS ON SI STER CITY RELATIONSHIP 20

Who We Are

Friends of Be an Angel



Friends of Be an Angel is a 501(c)(3) charity dedicated to providing humanitarian aid, medical evacuations, and support for refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) in Ukraine. Initially focused on delivering urgent medical supplies, food, and other necessities during the full-scale invasion, the organization has since expanded to include medical evacuations for complex cases, educational platforms for war-affected children, and the rehabilitation of critical infrastructure.

Headquartered in Milwaukee, USA, Friends of Be an Angel operates with a network of employees and volunteers across the U.S., Europe, and Ukraine. Led by director Anya Verkhovskaya, a seasoned human rights advocate, the organization draws on her longstanding work in refugee and IDP rights to deliver effective aid. Through her leadership, the organization has established partnerships that allow it to reach the most vulnerable communities in Ukraine.

As the U.S.-based sister organization to Be an Angel, founded in Berlin during the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis, Friends of Be an Angel benefits from a global network. Be an Angel began by offering housing, food, legal aid, and medical support to refugees in Germany, eventually expanding to aid in challenging environments like refugee camps in Belgrade and Moria. Since the invasion of Ukraine, the network has focused on evacuation routes and humanitarian aid for IDP camps and hospitals.

Through its partnership with Be an Angel, the organization has opened offices in Chisinau, Moldova, and Odesa, Ukraine, focusing on evacuations from cities like Mykolaiv and Kherson. Friends of Be an Angel now emphasizes medical evacuations, reconstruction, and long-term support, continuing to deliver life-saving aid to those affected by war and displacement.



Anya Verkhovskaya

Director CEO of Class Experts Group



Ganna Yudiivska

Board Member UN working group on Arbitrary Detentions



Stella Ayzinger

Secretary of the Board of Directors



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Want to learn more? Visit our website at www.friendsofbeanangel.org



Introduction

In 2024, Milwaukee and Irpin continued to deepen their Sister City partnership through cultural exchange, humanitarian support, and business collaboration. This year saw the strengthening of educational infrastructure, new calls for international business engagement, and ongoing advocacy for Ukraine amid the challenges of war. Together, our communities proved once again that solidarity and cooperation can transcend borders.

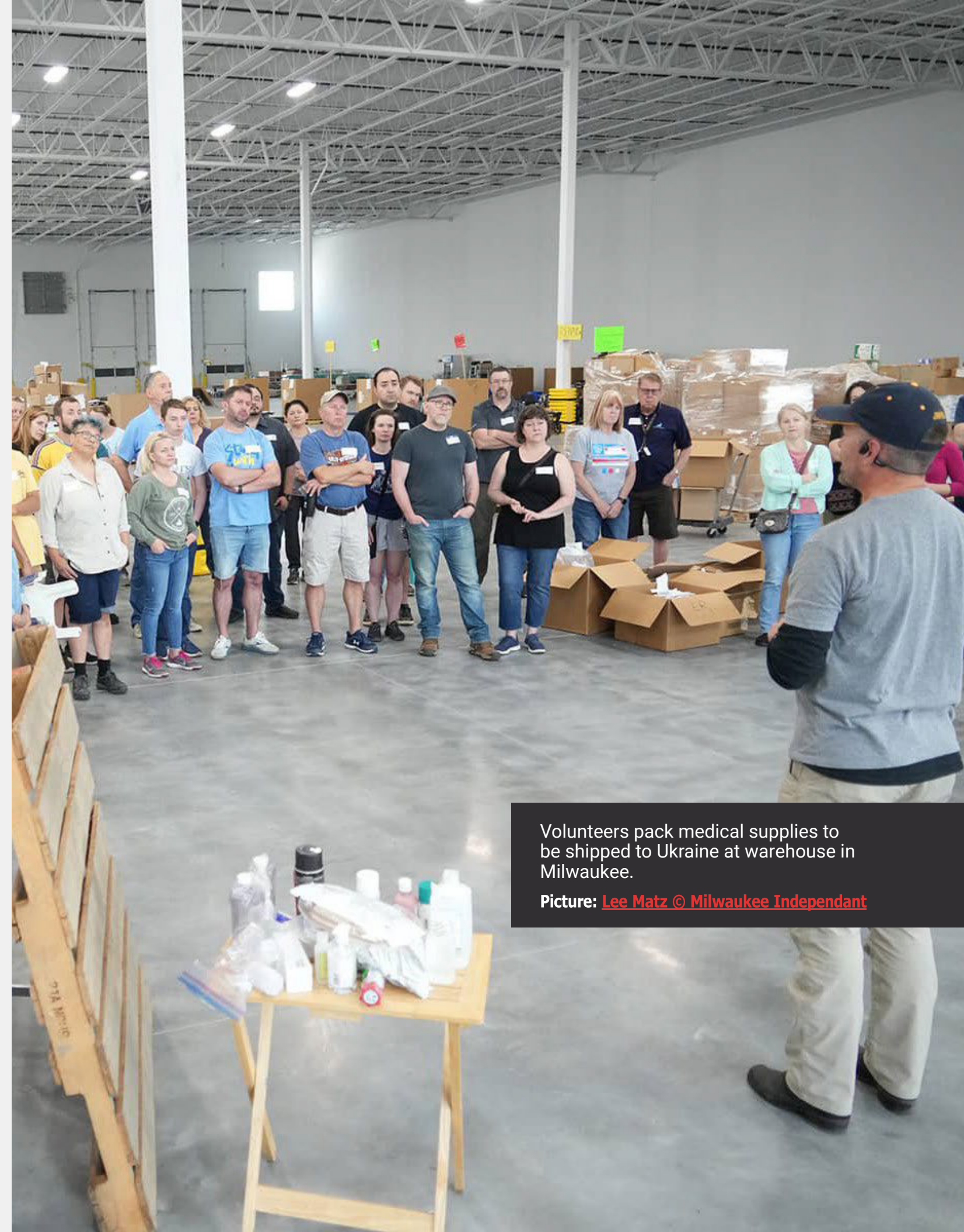
Key 2024 Highlights

1. Strengthening Education & Technology Access

Donation of Wi-Fi Access Points: Advanced Wireless, Inc. (AWI) shipped hundreds of site-survivable Wi-Fi access points to schools and bomb shelters accross Irpin. Valued at over \$2 million, this initiative ensures that Irpin's residents and students can have access to the Internet and children continue their education safely, even during air raids.

Technical support and training accompanied the donation, guaranteeing sustainability and impact.

Impact: Enabled vital informational gateway and digital learning for thousands of residents including children, supporting Irpin's war recovery and resilience.



Volunteers pack medical supplies to be shipped to Ukraine at warehouse in Milwaukee.

Picture: [Lee Matz](#) © [Milwaukee Independant](#)

Business & Civic Engagement

In 2024, Milwaukee hosted Irpin’s current and former mayors, who urged the city’s business community to support Irpin’s rebuilding

Meetings highlighted opportunities for trade, investment, and sustainable development.

Milwaukee leaders reaffirmed their commitment to mobilizing resources, expertise, and partnerships.

Impact: Created a platform for Milwaukee businesses to engage directly with Irpin’s recovery projects, particularly in construction, technology, and education.



Raising Awareness of Environmental & Humanitarian Challenges

Reports this year underscored the devastating impact of unexploded ordnance contaminating surrounding Irpin farmlands, compounded by climate change. Milwaukee organizations helped amplify awareness through media and advocacy, connecting local audiences with Irpin’s ongoing struggles.

Impact: Drew attention to Ukraine’s long-term challenges beyond immediate wartime needs, encouraging continued international support.

In the news

Irpin deepens cooperation with American Milwaukee (video)

Click here

Mayors of Milwaukee and Irpin expand Sister City cooperation after visit by nonprofit delegation

Click here

Cultural Exchange

Cultural exchange is the mutual sharing of traditions, customs, arts, and values between communities, fostering understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures. It plays a crucial role in sister city relationships by building strong, people-to-people connections that transcend geographical and political boundaries. For Milwaukee and Irpin, this exchange deepens the bond between the cities and encourages a spirit of unity and solidarity, especially during challenging times. Friends of Be an Angel has actively promoted cultural exchange by organizing events like the Ukrainian Independence Day celebration, coordinating the donation of Ukrainian children's books to the Milwaukee Public Library, and hosting delegation visits between the cities. These initiatives have helped bridge cultural gaps, enrich both communities, and strengthen the sister city relationship through shared experiences and support.

Milestones:

- 100 additional children's books were donated from the city of Irpin towards the Milwaukee Public Library
- Ukrainian Independence Day celebration and raising of Ukrainian flag at the City Hall of Milwaukee



Lee Matz © Milwaukee Independant

Ukrainian Independance Day

August 24, 2024

In celebration of Ukraine’s Independence Day on August 24, Friends of Be an Angel played a key role in organizing events that highlighted Milwaukee's ongoing support for its sister city, Irpin. Mayor Cavalier Johnson, a strong advocate for the Ukrainian community since the start of the Russian invasion, sent a video message to the residents of Irpin, which was broadcast on local television. In his message, Mayor Johnson reaffirmed Milwaukee’s solidarity with Irpin, recognizing the city’s strength and resilience during the war, and honoring those who have fought for Ukraine’s independence.

As part of the Independence Day celebration, Friends of Be an Angel worked alongside city officials to organize the ceremonial raising of the Ukrainian flag at Milwaukee’s Frank

P. Zeidler Municipal Building. This event, symbolizing Milwaukee’s unity with Irpin and Ukraine, included remarks from Anya Verkhovskaya, Director of Friends of Be an Angel, who emphasized the importance of continuing to raise awareness about the war and the hardships facing the people of Ukraine. Verkhovskaya’s message reminded Milwaukee’s citizens of their vital role in supporting Irpin through ongoing humanitarian efforts and maintaining the strong sister city bond.

Milwaukee raises national flag of Ukraine on its Independence Day in solidarity with Sister City of Irpin

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Lee Matz © Milwaukee Independant



Holiday Folk Fair International

The Holiday Folk Fair is an annual cultural event in Milwaukee that celebrates diversity by showcasing traditions, arts, and crafts from around the world. This year, Friends of Be an Angel played a significant role in the event, with Boris Nayflish and Anya Verhovskaya dedicating their time to manning the Sister Cities Exhibit Booth. They highlighted the strong bond between Milwaukee and Irpin, sharing the story of our partnership with visitors and promoting awareness of the shared efforts to support Ukraine during these challenging times.



Humanitarian Support

Rescuing Vulnerable Children

A year and a half after the Russian Federation invaded Ukraine, Ukrainian hospitals continue to suffer from significant shortage of doctors, medicine and medical supplies. Many doctors are sent in rotations to frontline hospitals to assist with the high casualty rate, leaving a shortage of staff in every hospital. In addition, the consumption of medicine and medical supplies has increased immensely, leaving a scarcity in all regions of Ukraine. The unavailability of numerous treatment options has created a dire situation, especially for children suffering with severe medical conditions. Among the treatments sorely lacking in Ukraine is the medication required for treating Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA).

01. The Problem

Tragically, the mortality rate for infants suffering from SMA has soared to over 80% due to the ravages of war and the severe shortage of available treatment options in Ukraine. The only chance of hope for these infants is their evacuation to countries that provide the needed treatment necessary for their survival.

02. Our Solution

Our organization provides medical evacuation, resettlement, and facilitates treatment options for the child and their immediate family. We support the family by finding them treatment locations, provide case management, organizing staff, equipment and medical transport for the evacuation out of Ukraine, assist them with visa applications, document translation, find them a sponsor and provide them a place to live.



Sasha was evacuated to Milwaukee, Wisconsin in August, 2024. Within the first few months of treatment, he was able to walk stand for the first time.

MILWAUKEE COMMUNITY JOINS FORCES TO SUPPORT UKRAINIAN CHILDREN

In May 2024, the Milwaukee community came together to support 20-month-old Oleksandr "Sasha" Kutarenko, a Ukrainian child diagnosed with Spinal Muscular Atrophy, who fled the war in Ukraine with his family in search of life-saving medical treatment. With the assistance of Friends of Be an Angel, the Milwaukee community and close neighbors, they arrived in Milwaukee through the Uniting for Ukraine program, where they were met with immediate support from local organizations and medical professionals.

Sasha's condition required urgent care, and thanks to the swift response from Children's Wisconsin, his medical review began just days after arriving. The community's efforts, including financial aid, logistical support, and medical expertise, provided Sasha with a fighting chance at a better quality of life, underscoring the deep bond between Milwaukee and Ukraine.

Business Community of Milwaukee helps to provide tens of thousands of Ukrainians with heat and electricity.

In the fall of 2022, the armed forces of the Russian Federation carried out targeted missile attacks on critical infrastructure in Ukraine, resulting in one of the worst humanitarian disasters since the beginning of the full-scale invasion. The collapse of the power grid left millions of innocent Ukrainian civilians without water, heat and electricity during the coldest months of the year.

In anticipation of these attacks, Be an Angel launched a preemptive action by building a coalition of 42 organizations, charities and donors to provide 1,715 generators to the Ukrainian people.

In a short space of time, more than 17 million people across Ukraine were without electricity and heating. Generators were in extremely high demand, which led to skyrocketing market prices in a global economy that was already suffering from high inflation. Generators were sold out in many large cities. Even in Europe, many businesses had created a waiting list for emergency power generators.

To overcome these challenges, our US team devised an alternative solution: to order large quantities directly from the manufacturers. This allowed us to not only provide a large amount of 1,715 generators, but also purchase them at wholesale prices.

There was just one catch: a large advance payment had to be made, which was beyond our budget. The solution? We joined forces with 42 organizations to cover the down payment. Thanks to our partners in Ukraine, most of the generators could be delivered free of charge to frontline areas. This pragmatism enabled our coalition to avoid market prices, which had risen by up to 80%. This strategy allowed us to save a total of 1.2 million USD in additional costs.

The **Milwaukee community** played a vital role in making this project a reality. The **Rotary Club of Milwaukee** contributed over \$100,000, and the local business community rallied to provide financial and logistical support, demonstrating Milwaukee’s deep commitment to its Sister City, Irpin, and to Ukraine as a whole. This collaborative effort, which brought together businesses, nonprofit organizations, and local leaders, ensured that the generators reached more than 150 hospitals, 478 refugee centers, and numerous schools and community spaces. The collective action of the Milwaukee community has directly impacted over 20,000 people, providing them with heat, electricity, and hope.

The success of this initiative, recognized with the prestigious Gold Award at the 3rd Annual Anthem Award in the category of Humanitarian Action & Services: Partnership & Collaboration, showcases the power of global partnerships. Friends of Be an Angel, alongside its partners and the Milwaukee community, not only provided critical resources during a time of crisis but also symbolized solidarity and resilience. By working together, they delivered more than just generators—they restored hope to a nation in need.



Medical Shipments & Volunteering by the Milwaukee Community

On June 10, 2024, volunteers from across Wisconsin gathered at a Germantown warehouse for a “sort and pack” event, organized by Friends of Be an Angel, Wisconsin Ukrainians Inc., and the Ukrainian Medical Association of North America (UMANA). Over three shifts, volunteers worked tirelessly to prepare medical supplies for shipment to hospitals in Ukraine, focusing on field, military, and community care in occupied areas. The event was filled with a shared sense of purpose, as healthcare professionals guided volunteers in sorting, cleaning, labeling, and packing essential items like surgical gear and medical equipment. The supplies were sent to a warehouse in Lviv, Ukraine, operated by Friends of Be an Angel, to support those affected by the ongoing war. Dr. Douglas Davis of UMANA highlighted the importance of these efforts, calling them a “lifeline” for those in need. Despite the challenges, including a decline in donations, the event showcased the resilience and compassion of Wisconsin’s community in its ongoing support for Ukraine.



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Donation of 840 Wi-Fi Access Points

July 26, 2024

In July 2024, Advanced Wireless, Inc. (AWI) made a significant contribution to support the rebuilding of Irpin, Ukraine, by donating more than 840 site-survivable Wi-Fi access points to the city’s schools and bomb shelters. This initiative, coordinated through the Milwaukee-Irpin Sister Cities program and supported by Friends of Be an Angel, is aimed at restoring critical educational infrastructure damaged during Russia’s invasion. The Wi-Fi access points will allow students in Irpin to continue their education both in classrooms and in bomb shelters during air raids. AWI’s President, Darryl Morin, emphasized the vital role education plays in rebuilding Ukraine, stating that the donation will help nurture the next generation of leaders, doctors, engineers, and teachers. Alongside

the equipment, AWI is also providing technical support and training to ensure successful implementation, further demonstrating their commitment to the city’s recovery.

This donation, the result of discussions that began during Irpin Mayor Oleksandr Markushin’s visit to Milwaukee in May 2022, highlights the strong bond between the two Sister Cities. AWI’s contribution, valued at over \$2 million, is part of a larger effort to ensure that Ukraine’s students have access to quality education despite the ongoing war. The project also reflects the shared commitment of Milwaukee’s community to support Irpin’s recovery, with logistical support provided by Friends of Be an Angel and Wisconsin Ukrainians Inc.



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The trauma of living:
When being killed is
the preferred choice to
being disfigured from
battle [Click here](#)

Freeing Freddie:
Educational program
aims to reduce PTSD
for Ukraine’s war-
weary children
[Click here](#)

Combat surgeons
pioneer advances
in maxillofacial
reconstruction of
Ukraine’s injured
[Click here](#)

Milwaukee donors
cover cost of
reconstructive surgery
for American volunteer
wounded in battle
[Click here](#)

Lviv warehouse
serves as vital link in
medical supply chain
from Milwaukee to
frontlines
[Click here](#)

Aid from Milwaukee
is providing internally
displaced people in
Ukraine with food and
clothing
[Click here](#)

Being Friends of
Angels: The Milwaukee
nonprofit saving lives
and offering hope in
Ukraine
[Click here](#)

Interview with Tom
Barrett: U.S.
Ambassador to
Luxembourg reflects
on ties with Irpin
[Click here](#)

Advanced Wireless to
donate 840 access
points to rebuild Irpin’s
citywide Wi-Fi network
[Click here](#)

Children of Irpin begin
planning mural for
Mitchell Airport to
showcase Sister City
friendship
[Click here](#)



Former Vice President
Mike Pence visits Irpin
during unannounced
campaign trip to Kyiv
[Click here](#)

Milwaukee offers
Ukrainian refugee
family life-saving
treatment for son’s
genetic condition
[Click here](#)

Wisconsin volunteers
sort and pack donated
medical supplies for
use in Ukraine’s
hospitals
[Click here](#)

Nikita Pirnach: Irpin
student hopes to help
his country after
finishing education in
Milwaukee
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Return to Ukraine: A
trauma loop of travel
from Milwaukee to a
country still at war a
year later
[Click here](#)

Sick children wait for
overseas medical
treatments as a new
generation is born in
Ukraine during war
[Click here](#)

Wisconsin Ukrainians
host annual
fundraising picnic to
support homeland on
500th day of war
[Click here](#)

Iryna Suslova: The
superwoman saving
Ukrainian children
abducted by Russia
[Click here](#)

Irpin is not forgotten:
Residents thank
Milwaukee Independent
for reporting on their
“Hero City”
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Reps from Milwaukee’s
sister cities gather for
meet and greet at City
Hall
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