

I wanted to pen a letter to the community in the Second Ward in support of my friend, mentor, and candidate, Marla Decker. I've had the pleasure of knowing Marla for almost two years, but in that short time, I've grown to admire her intelligence, drive, and compassion. Those traits were on display when I first met Marla in early 2022—under candidly tough personal circumstances. It was in early 2022 that Russia began its unprovoked invasion of Ukraine. While you wouldn't know it from my last name—courtesy of my Irish father, Michael Hayden of South Orange, NJ—I am half-Ukrainian. My mother and her family came to America to escape the violence that is unfortunately paralleled in today's Ukraine. Being Ukrainian is extremely important to my identity, and I was, am, and always will be, deeply proud of my Ukrainian heritage. In March of 2022, I stood on the steps of City Hall and delivered a speech about my family's history and brought to light the horrors of the Russian invasion of my country of ancestry.

This was the day I met Marla, who also spoke at City Hall that day and outlined her great work for Rent for Refugees. I was so thankful for Marla's work and to see how she tapped into Hoboken's generosity by coordinating the program between the Mayor's Offices in Hoboken and Bialystok (a town in Poland receiving Ukrainian refugees fleeing from the invasion). Marla held several fundraisers, including a lemonade stand fundraiser and the "Bagels to Bialys" donation effort in coordination with our amazing Hoboken bagel shops (O'Bagels is my go-to, although you probably weren't wondering). In all, Marla helped over \$40,000, which went directly to housing refugees. I will always be deeply thankful to Marla for her work for Ukraine. Despite not having Ukrainian lineage, Marla stepped up when she saw others in need, and to me, that is a testament to her character and who she is.

Since then, I've gotten to know Marla through various other engagements and activities in Hoboken. I have the pleasure of serving alongside her on the leadership of the Hoboken Democratic Committee and continually see her bringing creativity, leadership, and, most importantly, commitment to the betterment of the city of Hoboken. I know Marla will bring these great traits to the Second Ward because she has continually shown her commitment to serving not only our great community but other communities in need. I'll be proud to vote for her in November, and I hope you will do the same.

-Matt