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BEND CHOSE THEM

Ukrainian Olympic hopeful finds home in Bend



Anhelina Hryhorenko, (#12) waits at the starting line with other competitors before the Oregon Interscholastic Racing Association Nordic girls 5K freestyle skate state championship race on Friday at the Mt. Bachelor Nordic Center. Joe Kline/Bulletin photos

BY MORGAN OWEN • The Bulletin

Coaches and officials at the Mt. Bachelor Nordic Center said it would take just 15 minutes for the fastest competitors to complete the course for the Oregon high school cross country skiing state championships. Waiting at the starting line of the 5K race, Anhelina Hryhorenko stood stoically, dressed in a blue and yellow athletic suit.

Her headband prominently displayed one word: Ukraine.

When the race began, the 14-year-old launched forward on her skis at an impressive speed as she held her own against a team of athletes that has sent competitors to the Junior Olympics.

To have reached the starting line Friday morning was a victory all by itself for Anhelina, whose dream is to one day become an Olympic cross-country skier. Her life has been one of anxiety and uncertainty ever since she and her family fled Ukraine in the aftermath of the Russian invasion two years ago.

But as they faced language barriers, housing challenges and adapting to a new culture in the U.S., Anhelina and her family found a refuge in Bend. They found people who believed in her dream just as much as she did.

Before the Russian invasion, Anhelina's path to the Olympics would have felt more certain. It runs in the family after all. Her father holds national titles in Ukraine and her aunt is Kateryna Gryhorenko, who represented Ukraine three times at the Olympics as a cross-country skier.

"We know how to get to the Olympics in Ukraine," said her mother, Yulia, through translator Mila Shelehoff. "But we have no idea how to do it in the United States."

There are people in Bend, though, who are helping them figure that out.

From Ukraine to Salem

Yulia explained Anhelina's talent



Anhelina Hryhorenko wears medals she's previously won from cross-country ski racing while standing with her family for a photo on Friday at the Mt. Bachelor Nordic Center. From left, mom, Yulia, brother, Ivan, and dad, Oleksandr.

Want to help?

If you want to get involved in helping the Hryhorenkos — and other Ukrainian families making their home in Bend — contact Mila Shelehoff and get involved with her initiative, Bend for Ukraine.

and struggles as she and Shelehoff drank Earl Gray tea with a spread of crackers and jam atop Shelehoff's dining room table on the westside of Bend. It's a Ukrainian custom, She-

hoff explained, to have tea with a snack in the evening.

Shelehoff is one of Yulia's only friends in Bend. Which makes sense since the Hryhorenkos only speak Ukrainian.

"The first night they were able to sleep without worrying about the air raids was one of the first nights when they got here," said Shelehoff, as she poured the tea.

When Russia first invaded Ukraine two years ago, on Feb. 24, 2022, it changed the Hryhorenkos' lives.

See **Ukrainian** / A5

INSIDE

• Bend High dominates the Oregon Interscholastic Ski Racing Association Nordic State Championships, **B1**

CENTRAL OREGON GROWTH | A DECADES-LONG STORYLINE

Problems persist, but solutions have worked



Dean Guernsey/The Bulletin

Elinor Wilson, a high school science teacher in Bend walks down a paved path lined with houses, which was once a narrow dirt trail where she road her bike through the woods as a child in northwest Bend.

BY TAYLOR BAYLY

The Bulletin

Elinor Wilson moved to Bend with her family in 2000 at age 4. The town's population hovered slightly above 50,000. NorthWest Crossing was still forestland. Heavy traffic was rare, and Bend's first roundabout had been built a year earlier.

Wilson left to attend college about 14 years later. When she finished her graduate degree and accepted a job at Realms High School in Bend, the city's population was inching toward 100,000. Wilson struggled to find housing that she could afford in Bend and signed a lease for a rental in Redmond, about 15 miles away.

"You would think as someone who grew up in the community and works a job serving the community — that you would be able to afford to live in the community," Wilson said. "That's not the case, and that's not the case for a lot of my co-workers, too."

High rental costs and expensive real estate go hand-in-hand with a well-loved location where there's not enough housing for all the people who want to live in it. It's a problem Central Oregon has grappled with for decades.

Growth has been an ongoing theme of Bend's storyline, one that long-time residents have heard ad nauseam.

Population surges starting in the late 1990s appeared manageable and represented an upswing for the community: A thriving health system was quickly attracting health-care providers to the area, more retail stores were opening, construction was booming and golf was the No. 1 draw for tourists. At the same time, there were emerging concerns around environmental challenges, infrastructure needs such as transportation and education, and a shift in industry from timber to tourism.

Yearlong series about growth

The Bulletin is launching a year-long series about the impacts and solutions related to growth in Central Oregon.

We'll compare how civic groups, government officials and local leaders addressed growth 20 to 25 years ago with a focus on four areas — environment, infrastructure, affordability/economics and housing. Bulletin reporters will examine the success of previous solutions, current approaches to growth issues and what other cities are doing to mitigate problems related to rapid increases in population, housing shortages, economic challenges and environmental impacts.

Bulletin archives capture this ongoing thread through hundreds of articles over the years. Growth-focused publications in 2000, 2002 and 2015 highlighted evolving approaches to mitigate concerns and the positive outcomes that come with an area's growth. Government officials — from city to federal levels — identified potential solutions, Central Oregon committees worked to address environmental concerns, such as clean air, and a group of residents formed Your Community 2000 to plan the best way forward for the community.

Some of the solutions worked, while others faltered. Many of the same concerns that stretch back to the 1990s remain today and a few new ones have emerged, such as homelessness.

Recreation destination

Some problems can be fixed with similar solutions.

See **Growth** / A6





Joe Kline/Bulletin photos

Anhelina Hryhorenko, 14, skates out of the starting line of the Oregon Interscholastic Racing Association Nordic girls 5K freestyle skate state championship race on Friday at the Mt. Bachelor Nordic Center.

Ukrainian

Continued from A1

Until that day, it had been a normal week. Anhelina was in western Ukraine at a cross-country ski competition while Yulia, Oleksandr — Anhelina's father — and her then 6-year-old brother Ivan went on with their regular routine. Yulia went to work as physical education teacher and Oleksandr as a carpenter.

Then the invasion started. Anhelina and the other cross-country ski competitors were evacuated to Poland while the Hryhorenkos were trapped inside the root cellar of their home for two weeks. When they felt safe to emerge, Yulia made a tough call.

"I made the decision to take Ivan and follow Anhelina to Poland. We were in Poland for three months before Kiev installed their anti-missile systems," Yulia said.

When they returned in Ukraine, life entered an uneasy normal.

At night Yulia, Ivan and Oleksandr would sleep in the root cellar and during the day they would try and keep a normal routine. Anhelina returned to her athletic boarding school to continue her training. Her parents hoped she would find some consistency.

It was a life of constant fear, Yulia said. They had no idea if the danger was coming or going, if the unmarked planes flying overhead held bombs or relief packages. And when the air-raid sirens went off, it felt like safety was a hopeless dream.

"It creates a lot of anxiety, especially when you hear the explosions," Yulia said. "The bunkers are truly root cellars. They're not bulletproof, they're not bomb proof."

Yulia and Oleksandr held out for nine months, but on Oct. 2022, Anhelina was caught in a massive air raid while commuting to school. It was time to leave. With the help of friends in Salem, who could sponsor them as refugees, the family began an application process that lasted a year.

Yulia's desperate plea

To hear Yulia put it, Anhelina was born to be a cross-country skier. "She's training like an athlete as opposed to recreational skiing," Yulia said. "She doesn't need to be told to do it. She does it because she loves to do it."



Anhelina Hryhorenko, 14, holds medals she's previously won from competing in cross-country ski races.

When the family arrived in Salem on Dec. 13, Yulia was set on finding a way for Anhelina to continue her passion for skiing. She wrote letters to every cross-country ski program she could find in the Pacific Northwest.

No one responded. One letter wound up on the desk of Reiter Hodgert, the program director for the Bend-based Mt. Bachelor Sports Education Foundation, a competitive education non-profit specializing in mountain sports. Reading Yulia's letter, he realized there was an opportunity for the program to do some good. When Hodgert got in touch with Yulia, he surprised her with his decision to bring Anhelina into the cross-country ski program tuition-free.

"I don't know why someone else wouldn't jump at the chance to work with a really cool athlete," Hodgert said. "We're dedicated to supporting her and her family however we can. It's much more important that we give her the opportunity she needs, so we're here to support that."

A little over a month of working with Anhelina, Hodgert is impressed. He said it's too early to tell about Anhelina's Olympic dreams in a sport where athletes peak in their 20s and 30s, but he's in awe of how she's handled the challenges presented to her.

"I'm incredibly impressed with the resiliency of her as a human," Hodgert said. "There's a lot of big changes. She jumped into a pretty well established group of peers that she didn't share a language with and — with very little hesitancy — started mixing it

up. It's been amazing."

Finding a home in Bend

Getting Anhelina into a cross country ski program was the easy part. It's been a challenge, however, for Yulia to find a permanent home for the family without all the credentials American citizens take for granted: a credit score, rental history, and references.

"They started with full sponsorships but (a U.S. resident) can simply say, 'I live here and I'm inviting them here' so they don't carry the financial burden of sponsorship," her friend Shelehoff explained.

Until they find something stable, the family is spending time in both Bend and Salem, where Oleksandr was able to get a job as a carpenter. While in Bend, Yulia, Anhelina and Ivan stay in a spare room offered by someone at the Mt. Bachelor Nordic Ski Center. Once the family gets more established, the plan is for Anhelina to attend Summit High School while Ivan will go to William E. Miller Elementary. Shelehoff hopes her friends will be reunited soon in Bend, where she is looking for a job for Oleksandr and has written letters to rental agencies pleading for them to consider the Hryhorenkos' housing application.

It has been hard, Yulia said, but there's nothing better than going to sleep in a real bed without the threat of an air-raid.

"Friends are supporting us from Ukraine saying it doesn't matter how hard it is here without friends and without home," she said. "You're safe and that's why you're here. Re-

member why you're here."

Anhelina found her own circle of support, too.

Anhelina finished 6th in the individual freestyle skate race on Friday with a time of 14:51.5, just one minute and 13 seconds slower than the winner.

After the race, the exhausted teen was embraced by equally exhausted competitors and team members. They looked as proud of Anhelina as Yulia was, as they whipped out their cell phones.



Anhelina finished 6th in the individual freestyle skate race on Friday with a time of 14:51.5, just one minute and 13 seconds slower than the winner.

Unhindered by war, culture or language, they tapped into Google Translate to congratu-

late her.
Reporter: mowen@bendbulletin.com, 541-633-2185

OBITUARY

Cainon S. McDonald

March 6, 1973 - February 15, 2024

Cainon was born and raised in Madras, Oregon where he worked in agriculture all his life. First farming with his family until 2000, then 20 years of service to Wilbur Ellis as Plant Operations Supervisor.

Cainon loved hunting and fishing with family and friends, he was also an avid football fan attending games and watching them on tv. Cainon loved being surrounded by his family, laughing at stories, watching game shows and playing board games.

He is survived by his wife of 15 years, Rhonda McDonald, and their beloved fur babies Fenway and Louis; parents, Norm & Bonnie McDonald; children, Evan (Audrey) McDonald of Monmouth OR, Emily (Bradley) Shaw of Redmond OR, Stacey Warwick of Madras OR, and Taylor Churchill of Eugene OR; grandchildren Alexia-Jean, Joshua, and Phoebe. He was preceded in death by both sets of grandparents, Ronald & Mary Jane McDonald, and Dean & Jean Hillman.

Services will be held at Cornerstone Baptist Church, Madras OR on March 9, 2024 at 10:00am followed by a private burial.

