

Dwojak family donates \$350,000 to enhance Ukrainian student exchange program with Iowa State University

AMES, Iowa - Stefan and Kateryna Dwojak, longtime supporters of an exchange program between Ukraine and Iowa State University, have donated \$350,000 to continue their support of the school. The gift was announced during an Iowa State University College of Agriculture donor recognition event here on November 15, 2003.

The gift kicks off a challenge to other supporters to raise \$1 million that will further aid student exchanges between Ukraine and Iowa State University.

"We intend to reach \$1 million fairly quickly and we invite everyone to help," Mr. Dwojak said. "This fund will help us reach another goal, which is to bring 1,000 students from Ukraine to the United States over the next several years."

The gift supports an exchange program that dates back 20 years, when Iowa State scientists first began visiting Ukraine. Since 1993 Iowa State students have been studying in Ukraine. In return, more than 500 Ukrainian students, scholars and trainees have studied at Iowa State.

The program targets students who are in their third or fourth year in a Ukrainian university or are successful professionals in Ukraine. The program is designed to ensure participants return to Ukraine.

"After the program at Iowa State students return home to finish their degree or continue work. This helps us maintain a high return rate," Mr. Dwojak said. "Individuals who do stay in the United States are accepted into a degree program to continue their education."

The Dwojaks, who live in Venice, Fla., met with several Ukrainian students during a recent visit to Ames. Iowa State has an active Ukrainian student club with 24 members enrolled in various university programs.

"We have tremendous feedback from the students who came here and now have exceptional jobs in Ukraine," Mr. Dwojak said. "This is a tremendous opportunity for young people because Ukraine is making huge progress and really improving economically."

Iowa State will begin offering Ukrainian language, history and culture classes on campus in January 2004. The classes are currently offered through a web-based partnership program with Pennsylvania State University.

"Offering Ukrainian language, history and culture classes is very important and I think will encourage others to give to the program and encourage Ukrainian students to participate," Mr. Dwojak said.

The Dwojaks are active members of the Ukrainian American community in the United States. They first learned about Iowa State's work in Ukraine in the early 1990s, and began supporting the program with donations and fund-raising efforts.

"Iowa fits this kind of exchange better than any state in the nation. It is like Ukraine in that both are

breadbaskets. Agriculture also is important to both areas," Mr. Dwojak said.

The College of Agriculture at Iowa State recently designated Ukraine as a strategic partner in its international education programs. David Acker, assistant dean of the College of Agriculture, said that the Dwojaks' gift is an investment in a program that benefits both Ukrainian and Iowa State students.

"The College of Agriculture is dedicated to pursuing research in a global context and educating students to work effectively in a global economy. This will help the college and aid Ukrainian students who will form the foundation for a democratic and prosperous Ukraine," Mr. Acker said.

Mr. Acker recalled meeting students who had participated in the exchange program when he visited Kyiv. He visited three former exchange students who were successful in Ukraine.

"I was invited to dinner by three young men that had participated in our program. One was president of the Ukrainian branch of a multinational company, one was a regional sales manager of a U.S. based company and another ran his own information technology company."

Catherine Woteki, dean of the College of Agriculture, thanked the Dwojaks at the event that recognized their contribution to the College of Agriculture.

"We recently completed two decades of cooperation with Ukraine and with the Dwojaks' leadership gift we are assured that we will continue cooperation long into the future," Ms. Woteki said.

For Mykola Sarazhynskyy, a Ukrainian student, the exchange program has lead to an opportunity to study agricultural business at Iowa State University for the past two years. He met the Dwojaks six years ago in Kyiv and the following year he visited Iowa State.

"This is an opportunity for Ukrainian students to visit other countries and get an understanding about how things operate outside Ukraine," Mr. Sarazhynskyy said. "It also helps students take what they learn back to Ukraine."

Ukrainian students at Iowa State established a club over a year ago to share knowledge about their country with American friends. The club has 24 members and 34 associate members.

"The club organizes celebrations of Ukrainian Independence Day, participates in cultural events on campus and in the community, advises Iowa State students planning trips to Ukraine and helps Ukrainian students feel at home, whether they are in Iowa for short- or long-term visits," said Mr. Sarazhynskyy.

In September, eight faculty and staff members from Iowa State University visited Ukraine, and next spring six Ukrainian agribusiness leaders will visit Iowa State to learn about grain and seed marketing. Next May, 20 Iowa State students and four faculty will leave for a study tour of Ukraine.

For information about the program or for information on how to help support the program, contact Mr. Acker, ISU-Ukraine Student Exchange Program, 104 Curtiss Hall, Iowa State University, Ames, IA 50011; or e-mail dacker@iastate.edu. You can also contact Rich Bundy in the college's development office at (515) 294-9088 or at rbundy@iastate.edu.

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