

We Are All Ukrainians

A garden party to raise funds for Ukrainian refugees in Lucca



Members of the Ukraine Benefit Event Committee

When Russia invaded Ukraine in late February, the world felt the besieged nation's pain. But no one could have foreseen that it was the beginning of a mass exodus: in the space of a few short weeks, nearly four million Ukrainians have fled the country as bombs have turned some cities to rubble, knocked out power, heat, and water in others, and spread fear everywhere.

While border countries have opened their arms to most of these refugees, more than 70,000 – primarily women and children, as the men stay behind to defend their homeland – have found their way to Italy, including Lucca, with more coming every day. They arrive frightened, homeless, hungry, and cut off from everything they know, including language, with no idea what will become of them or their country. Reading about their plight, local resident Jonell Galloway wanted to find a way to help, and being a longtime culinary writer, her thoughts naturally turned to food.

I read that Olia Hercules, a Ukrainian chef working in London, had started an initiative called #CookForUkraine, with the proceeds going to UNICEF, says Jonell, and I thought, 'Why not do a benefit dinner in Lucca?' So I dropped the seed of an idea into the ground, and it quickly blossomed: I consulted a few friends, we formed a committee of dynamic, hardworking people, and the benefit is taking shape as a lovely dinner and concert.

The fundraiser will be held May 14 (rain date May 15) in the charming garden of Gianluca Pardini's **Scuola Internazionale di Cucina Italiana**, a former convent. It will feature a buffet of Ukrainian foods prepared by Ukrainian chef Roman Korol, co-owner of the Lucca wine bar and bistro **Stravinsky**, assisted by students of the cooking school. Wines from local producers will flow as opera singers such as Vladimir Reutov, tenor and co-owner of Stravinsky, and soprano



Roman Korol, Vladimir Reutov

Benefit on behalf of Ukrainians in Lucca, in collaboration with Caritas

A Ukrainian buffet and performances by Ukrainian and other musicians, at the International School of Italian Cooking in Lucca on 14 May (rain date 15 May) beginning at 6 pm

The suggested donation for the event – or for those who can't attend but wish to support this cause – is 100 euros per person, in advance (larger donations are of course welcome). No tickets will be sold at the door. The

*ticketing system is being prepared and will be announced later. Meanwhile, for further information, please contact us at the **Grapevine** magazine: editor@luccagrapevine.com*

Olympia Hetherington, plus Ukrainian and other musicians, will entertain throughout the event. *Il Coro del Sole*, a children's choir coordinated by Elio Antichi of *Il Baluardo* music association, and participants in the *Laboratorio Orchestrale Lucchese*, a children's orchestra formed by **Caritas**, will also perform. The music program coordinator will be Maestro Tommaso Valenti.

Thanks to an outpouring of generosity from the Lucca community, the proceeds will go directly to help refugees in our area through the charity organization Caritas Lucca. All food and wine is being donated by local supermarkets, producers, and wineries, including Conad, Consorzio del Vino di Montecarlo, and **Tenuta Adamo** winery (at Pieve San Stefano). The venue too is being offered at no cost by Lauro Dini of **Convictus**, as are the time and talents of everyone involved. Caritas activities on behalf of the Ukrainian refugees, including this event, will be supported by other institutions as well, such as the Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di

Lucca, which will supplement with their own contribution the various fundraising initiatives taking place in our region; and, says Jonell, *we are working hard on obtaining additional sponsorship and financial support from other Lucca institutions.* She adds, *At every turn in the road, the Lucchese businesses, charitable organizations, authorities, and producers have received us with open arms and are responding without hesitation to our requests. It has been such a gratifying experience.*

So come out to enjoy the garden, the food, and the music while helping people who need your help so very much right now.

*– by Candy Gianetti
– photos by Thomas S. England*

Any businesses wishing to donate products to the event, please contact Peter White at phw1205@gmail.com

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