



Story produced by:



Yaroslav and Bohdan Hrechaniuk
 Lincoln Electric
 Machine Repair Mechanic; Machine Repair Electrician

Ukrainian Refugees Fill Skilled Trades Gap

Patience and minimal accommodations lead to win-win

Yaroslav Hrechaniuk has come a long way to take a step back. But he wouldn't have it any other way.

The Ukrainian refugee left his war-torn homeland with his family in late 2022 after almost daily bombings and “take cover” alarms at an airport near their western Ukraine home.

They first crossed the border into Poland before learning of

a program called “United for Ukraine” that would allow them to travel to the U.S. to live and work while the war rages on. Hrechaniuk’s daughter-in-law has upwards of 100 family members in northeast Ohio, which made that option even more attractive.

Shortly after settling in, Hrechaniuk, age 52, and three family members attended a hiring event at Euclid’s Lincoln Electric. Despite a language barrier, the hiring managers

quickly recognized the talent and experience that greeted them.

“I found out that Yaroslav had an extensive mechanical background, a master’s degree in mechanical engineering, and supervisory experience with a Ukrainian manufacturer,” said Maintenance Supervisor Mike Sorine.

Hrechaniuk aced his employer’s skilled trades assessment test and was hired as a machine repair mechanic.

Tapping into hidden workforces

Like many Ohio manufacturers, Lincoln Electric's workforce, particularly its skilled trades workforce, is aging. Retirement parties are virtually outnumbering the qualified applicants seeking opportunities to backfill these critical positions.

Being open to "hidden" workforces like the immigrant and refugee populations are among the ways employers are plugging skilled labor gaps. Resources like translators, electronic translation devices and assistance with employment-related paperwork exist to help employers.

"Yaroslav has been a wonderful addition to our workforce," Sorine said. "To understand that he's coming into a totally new environment and taking a step back in his career to be here is a

testament to his positive attitude and strong work ethic.

"His co-workers have embraced and welcomed him, and to his credit, he's been diligently working on learning English through classes and online programs."

Hrechaniuk, through his interpreter – his son and co-worker, Bohdan Hrechaniuk – said it's only fair to start at his modest position despite his extensive training and experience overseas.

"We've never worked in a big American manufacturing company before," Yaroslav said. "We must learn. We must see how everything works at the plant floor level before we can advance into bigger roles."

Bohdan, 25, holds a master's degree in electronics in Ukraine, and has experience working in high-voltage applications. He

passed the very difficult electrician skilled trades assessment and was hired as a machine repair electrician at Lincoln Electric.

An eventual return to Ukraine?

Refugees are allowed to remain in their host country as long as they continue to meet the criteria for refugee status and do not voluntarily return to their country of origin.

The Hrechaniuks follow the developments in their home country every day and say they would like to eventually move back.

"Maybe in 6-8 years," Yaroslav said. "We want to see when war stops and how war stops. In the meantime, we appreciate everyone's support and offers to help us."

Immigrant vs. Refugee ... What's the difference?

"Immigrant" and "refugee" are often used interchangeably. While both terms represent individuals moving from one country to another, they do so under different circumstances and legal frameworks.

- **Immigrant:** Individuals who choose to leave their country of origin voluntarily and settle in another country. Immigrants typically go through a formal immigration process, which involves obtaining visas or residence permits and abiding by the host country's immigration laws.

- **Refugee:** Individuals who flee their home countries due to a well-founded fear of persecution, violence, war or other serious threats to their safety. They seek asylum in countries that offer protection under international law.

Once granted refugee status, individuals are immediately entitled to certain rights, such as the right to work. With the Hrechaniuks, they were both issued work permits and social security numbers, which made processing their employment as easy as it would be for an American citizen being onboarded.

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