



NEWS FROM
ULSTER COUNTY
County Executive Jen Metzger

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**County Executive Jen Metzger and Chair of the Legislature
Peter Criswell Sign Historic Ukrainian ‘Sister Community’
Agreement With Chernivtsi Regional Council in Virtual
Signing Event**

AGREEMENT IS FIRST IN THE U.S. BETWEEN A COUNTY AND A UKRAINIAN REGION

KINGSTON, NY - On Friday, Ulster County Executive Jen Metzger and Chair of the Legislature Peter Criswell signed a "Sister Community" agreement with the Chernivtsi Regional Council of Ukraine in a virtual signing ceremony, and in the presence of local leaders and members of the Ukrainian-American community. While the City of Kingston and other cities have entered into "Sister City" agreements, Ulster County becomes the first County in the United States to do so with a region of Ukraine.

The virtual signing ceremony brought together Chernivtsi Regional Council members Oleksii Boiko, Chairman of the Chernivtsi Regional Council; Mykhailo Pavliuk, Deputy Chairman of the Chernivtsi Regional Council; and Yurii Bodnar, Head of the Department for International Relations and Cross-Border Cooperation.

Approved by the County Legislature at the April 15 session, the Sister Community agreement aims to foster opportunities for education, cultural exchange, and municipal collaboration. The signing event highlighted the important role of community involvement, with residents joining the celebration and affirming the shared hope for a meaningful and impactful partnership.

“This agreement reflects Ulster County's deep commitment to building bridges — not just between governments, but between people,” **said County Executive Jen Metzger.** “I am

incredibly proud that Ulster County is leading the way as the first County in the United States to establish this meaningful connection with a Ukrainian region and show our solidarity with the Ukrainian people. We have a lot to learn from one another, and I look forward to a fruitful partnership.”

“As Chair of the Ulster County Legislature, I’m proud to see our government take this step in partnership with the Chernivtsi Regional Council. This agreement reflects the values we hold dear — community, democracy, and mutual support — and demonstrates the role local leadership can play in global solidarity,” **said Peter Criswell, Chair of the Ulster County Legislature.** “I’ve heard from many residents who shared how meaningful this partnership is to them and how grateful they are that Ulster County is standing with the people of Ukraine during such a critical time.”

"The world knows that Ukraine is fighting for its independence, suffers from Russian shelling every day, and our soldiers are laying down their lives on the battlefield, so it is important for every Ukrainian to know that we are not alone in our struggle,” **said Oleksii Boiko, Chairman of the Chernivtsi Regional Council.** “Every agreement, every project implemented, every handshake between partners is a reminder of support that Ukraine is an important and independent state, that the death of soldiers is not in vain, because the country they died for is alive!"

“Partnerships between districts, cities, and countries are, above all, partnerships between people. They bring new friendships, projects, innovations, and valuable exchanges of experience,” **said Svitlana Blinova, Coordinator of the Cities4Cities Initiative.** “The experience of the United States is particularly important for Ukraine — for example, in supporting veterans. In turn, we are ready to share our knowledge in areas like resilience and digitalization. By exchanging experiences, we create new meanings and generate new ideas.”

The ceremony highlighted heartfelt remarks from local community members with ties to the Chernivtsi Region. Residents of Ukrainian heritage, including dedicated advocates and families, came together during the virtual event to honor this historic milestone and celebrate the deepening connection between Ulster County and Ukraine.

“Cooperation among cities and nations is the best armor against ignorance and tyranny,” **said Rev. Ivan Kaszczak, Pastor of Holy Trinity Ukrainian Catholic Church in Kerhonkson.** “Friendship is more valuable than riches.”

“I immigrated from Ukraine to the United States when I was 18 years old and still have family

members living there,” **said Irena Wisneski, SUNY Ulster Administrative Services Specialist.** “My dad's cousin actually lives in Chernivtsi, as well as his son with his family, so this agreement is important to me personally. It shows that we care and support the people of Ukraine, and it gives them hope and faith to keep standing in the fight for their freedom. I am thankful and delighted that Ulster County government is engaging with the sister community in Ukraine and believe that this agreement will bring great things and make a profound impact for all involved.”

“My parents met in Chernivtsi,” **said Meira Blaustein, Co-Founder / Executive Director of the Woodstock Film Festival.** “It was 1945, the end of World War II. My mother, Riva, my uncle Monia, and my grandparents Sonia and Meir just escaped four years of hard labor camp in Siberia and were living in a one room attic, when my mother met my father, Senia. At the start of the war my father, then a med student, volunteered for the Red Army to fight against the Germans and was hit by a bullet. Wounded, he was discharged and was given a two-bedroom apartment in Chernivtsi. Once he met my mother, the two fell in love, and Senia, smitten, gave his two-bedroom apartment to Riva and her family, with him moving to their one room attic. After a year living in Chernivtsi, they all left and started the harrowing trip across Europe towards Israel. If Riva and Senia did not meet in Chernivtsi, I would not have been born, and the Woodstock Film Festival would not exist!”

“As a Ukrainian American, a resident of Ulster County, and a proud member of the Ukrainian American Youth Association, I want to express my deep gratitude to the Ulster County team for entering into this meaningful partnership,” **said Danylo Mykula, Hudson Valley Chapter of the Ukrainian American Youth Association board member.** “This collaboration not only brings vital awareness to the ongoing struggle Ukrainians face under relentless attack by Russia, but also offers an opportunity for our community to share in the rich traditions and cultural beauty of Ukraine. There are many residents in Ulster County with Ukrainian roots, and I know this gesture resonates deeply with them. It means a great deal to see our heritage acknowledged and supported in such a thoughtful way.”

My maternal grandparents were from Lviv and paternal grandparents from Khmelnytsky. My grandparents held onto the Ukrainian language and culture while in the U.S. and thankfully passed them down to my siblings and I,” **said Katherine Mykula, Hudson Valley Chapter of the Ukrainian American Youth Association board member.** “This partnership between the Ulster County Government and Chernivtsi is very valuable as it will continue communication and learning as well as bring awareness to what Ukraine has been going through since the full-scale Russian invasion began. The human connection itself is meaningful but the partnership could lead to educational and economic development as well.”

"As a longtime Ulster County resident and founder of the Mokosh Ukrainian Weaving Center in Gardiner, I feel deeply connected to the Ukrainian community. My roots, tied to my mother, a WWII Ukrainian refugee, and my father, a third-generation Ukrainian-American, inspire my love for culture and art. During my studies at SUNY New Paltz, I visited the Chernivtsi Region and was struck by its beauty — the rivers, green hills, and intricate folk art — reminding me of the connections we share across continents. This Sister Community agreement brings hope and strengthens those bonds during Ukraine's fight for freedom," **said Halyna Shepko, Mokosh Ukrainian Weaving Center founder.** "I look forward to cultural and educational exchanges, such as a virtual weaving project on Bukovinian tapestry traditions, which will enrich both communities. Thank you, County Executive Jen Metzger and Legislature Chair Peter Criswell, for making this agreement a reality and affirming that Ukraine matters in Ulster County."

"Chernivtsi has some of the most magical forests and hilly terrain as it includes the Carpathian Mountains. It reminds me of Ulster County's foothills and mountains! The Carpathian Mountains are home to a unique, sophisticated people called the Hutsuls. Their folklore includes intricate designs on Easter eggs as well as their clothing and woodworking. The Hutsuls believed that the fate of the world is connected to the art of pysanka, the Ukrainian Easter egg. Every region in Ukraine has its unique designs. It is an art passed down through generations, including my own," **said Larysa Melnyk Dyrszka, Ukrainian American from Sullivan County and a retired pediatrician.** "This cultural exchange is an amazing opportunity to share the best of our cultures. I appreciate the opportunity to be included."

Also in attendance were Ulster County Human Rights Director Joe McDonald, Ulster County resident Tim Distel, whose ties to the Chernivtsi Region originally helped facilitate this partnership; Father Ivan Kaszczak, Pastor of Holy Trinity Ukrainian Catholic Church in Kerhonkson; and Stephen Barankewicz, Managing Director of the Soyuzivka Ukrainian Heritage Center in Kerhonkson.

The Sister Community agreement serves as a foundation for fostering international collaboration, strengthening bonds between Ulster County and Ukraine, and creating opportunities to enrich lives in both regions.

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