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[00:00:00] **Speaker 1** I am rolling. Whenever you're ready. So thinking back to almost a year ago in February of 2022, what were those first few weeks like after the initial invasion? I mean, for us, the the our initial phase of the war was was one that you. A little bit of terror until we had evacuated my wife's family safely to our home. Wisconsin. And then immediately after we got them settled, we brought their boys over and had to get them just plugged into school and life. In the US. Are our focus turned really quite immediately to seeing what we could do to try to provide assistance to Ukraine. And given that, myself, my wife. But us drink physicians. And then my brother in law, sister in law, my wife's sister. We're both practicing physicians in Ukraine. Up until the end of the war began, the most obvious natural fit for us was. To see what we could do to leverage our health care backgrounds to mobilize resources. From the United States and then to use our networks of physicians in Ukraine to help to help get a distribution to where it would be most useful. That's where we linked up very, very early on with the Ukrainian Medical Association of North America. I, I knew the the president of the national organization, Dr. Leo Wolanski, who just happened to be a fellow radiologist who just turned. The course of reality for us, and we'd cross paths a number of times. And when someone told us that that we should reach out to Mona and gave us his email, I was like, Well, I know Leo and I'll give him a call. He introduced us to the Illinois chapter and the the team of. Of physicians in Chicago that had already sent a a an air cargo flight of about 50 tons of medical supplies. We had a meeting with them and my brother in law, Dr. Tarasov, and I went down to the warehouse that they had in Chicago, which is right on the north end of O'Hare, and helped with one of the second flight. Kind of learn the process of how they were. They were organizing. At the same time it was again, it's like a string of serendipity is where we just because we were in Wisconsin, we had had a lot of it. Contacts in the Ukraine community here where we were trying to work with. And someone had asked us to come to this warehouse in Germantown to help with an aid drive that was being organized by Help Heroes of Ukraine, which is a charity that was founded by Igor Kurlansky, Patrick Transport. I brought my my brother in law those trucks up and my father in law to on a weekend to help out with that. And we we met in the warehouses to help them with the medical portion of the of the drive that they were dealing with. And they were at your door, Lansky and introduced me, my brother in law and father in law and realized they're both they're all from Libya. And it turns out Mr. Lansky was also a neighbor of the president of the Illinois chapter, Dr. Alan Gordon. And immediately you were basically handed over the keys of the warehouse and and let us basically start this operation, which has been running in parallel and in collaboration with the the portion of the Illinois chapter that's working in Chicago. And at the again, string of serendipity is a contact in Madison Rotary. I was working with the Milwaukee Rotary on another international project. I told them about our family and what we were trying to do with the medical aid. And I get a call that the week after we had been here at this warehouse from Jerry to Pontiac, who's the head of the World Community Service Committee, and waiting to see what the Milwaukee club could do to help. I told them about the warehouse and what we were doing with the miner, and he was like, Well, what do you say we meet in the warehouse and, you know, drive for tomorrow? So we met here in the warehouse, and at that point in time, it was pretty much completely empty. We we knew that we had about 200 pallets of medical supplies ever coming our direction from from all over the country, from California, from New York, uh, from Minnesota, from Indiana, from. I think we even had about 20 pilots come from Georgia. So we knew we had things on the way. We just didn't have we didn't have the the supplies to do the packaging and shipping. Uh, and Jerry said, Well, let's meet with our team there. And we showed up with my brother in law and my sister in law, Dr. John Hammer, and the team from the Milwaukee Rotary, which included Jerry Mary McCormick, Joanne Grinnell, Dr. Bob Gleason and Teresa Regan, and sort of went over what we had seen for us and I had seen at the warehouse in Chicago. And we're like, We'd like to do that here. And that group was like, Okay, how about we connect to this one? So nine days. So in nine days, we, we, we provisioned all of the packaging and supplies that we needed to to get it on an air cargo transport. The Rotary Club of Milwaukee's office handled the assembling of all of the volunteers, which came from both the medical communities and in Waukee and in Madison, Wisconsin, but also the non-medical volunteers that just helped us with all the heavy lifting which came from Ukranian communities across Wisconsin, but just also Rotary Club community and just the general communities. And that I think we ran our first packaging and sorting event, uh, first the first week of April, I think maybe April 3rd and put together about I think it was about £20,000 of assorted medical supplies for that first round. And then we've run another five or six packaging and sporting events since then where each one we've done. In the same order. We're probably just from this warehouse and.

[00:07:09] **Unidentified** You know, over, you know, well over £100,000 of medical supplies.

[00:07:16] **Speaker 1** And then I showed you where we we regularly pull out some of the most critical aid items on an ongoing basis to pack into a commercial or into duffel bags or suitcases to send over on commercial flights, because in addition to the the air cargo and maritime cargo that that Illinois chapter sent, which is probably coming close to about. 400 tons. They've also sent about over about 4000 individually packed suitcases or duffle. Sort of critical item there and taken over through Warsaw and basically had delivered Ukraine. So. It's it's been an incredible process that's involved a lot of different organizations.

[00:08:12] **Unidentified** And all volunteer. Uh, very early on, the Rotary Club in Milwaukee.

[00:08:19] **Speaker 1** You know, came in and this operation would not exist without them. You've been the backbone of. But as we've gone on through the process. Things, you know, have changed and evolved over the course of the past 10 to 11 months, whereas in the beginning things were or were quite easy in terms of getting the transport to take the supplies. Compassion fatigue, normalization of the abnormal in became much more difficult as we got into the later spring, and particularly with the summer, to arrange for shipping and transport and things like that. And. Sometime in the late spring. I came into contact with IVIG of Skylar for being an angel because she was trying to work with some of our partners down in Chicago on ambulances, which amounted to minutes, I think about 30 at that point. And soon Sonya was based out of Milwaukee. They said, Well, you should contact Doug because Doug's working in our warehouse up there. And I think by that time in time in the process, I come across hundreds of different people and, you know, wanting to help. And some were productive, some less. So I think I spent 5 minutes on the phone with Sonya and. It was like you clearly know how to get things done, including how to get some things done that I don't have a clue about. And so I was like, I would like to be at the warehouse. And so she met here with me and my brother in law, and we got to show her the operation. We had we had probably 50 gaylord boxes of supplies that we were having trouble getting shipped. And she's like, I could take care of that. And so we that was our we worked on that through the summer. She had secured funding through the pharmacy company at the they were providing the transport. And we've we've been, you know, working together on, on medical aid and other things sort of like hand in glove ever since and recruited her to join the worker club in Milwaukee that came apart about because. She and her organization. It recognized very early on I think before most about the the the the needs for generators that was going to arise over the course of the winter that Russia would be targeting critical infrastructure. And she had managed to even over the summer, begin to negotiate. Discounted prices for generators sourced in Europe that wouldn't have to ship and that would be compatible with the European. Energy infrastructure. And as soon as she started working on that, I we we started talking with Rotary. It was like, well. We've said to the Rotary, we've been working so successfully with the Chinese so far, we should we should get behind this one and. And then what? What started out as just the Rotary Club of Milwaukee, working with us here at the warehouse with the medical supplies. We gave then a partnership with Tanya's group and Angel, who had done all the the homework and upfront work for the generators. And then Rotary Club of Milwaukee was able to branch out from our district and get the Rotary Clubs and districts throughout the state and even up into the Upper Peninsula of Michigan involved and and assist with the fundraising for that because she's she's managed to secure funding for over 1000 generators at a price point, a little less than $1,000,000. But we needed to do fundraising for that in Wisconsin Rotary Clubs. And so Rotary Clubs have really come through in a fantastic way to do that. We've even partnered with one of the Rotary Clubs in the partner city where where these these generators are being.

[00:12:44] **Unidentified** Delivered and distributed from. It's just been an incredible.

[00:12:49] **Speaker 1** Evolution over the past year of how string of serendipity has led to a lot of different relationships.

[00:12:57] **Unidentified** That have then led to.

[00:13:02] **Speaker 1** Partnerships of. Different organizations and organizations that each one has. It brings to the table a different set of strengths and abilities. Has been able to accomplish. It's a pretty remarkable things.

[00:13:17] **Unidentified** And as someone with a medical background, what's it been like learning about international shipping?

[00:13:23] **Speaker 1** I well, I I've said I've come to say a lot of things over the past year. One is that I think learning about all of that may have even been harder than.

[00:13:32] **Unidentified** Medical school because.

[00:13:37] **Speaker 1** Medical school, you knew the curriculum, you knew what you had to learn. If you showed up, then you did what you were told and you're going to probably make it through. Whereas there's no there's been no roadmap for any of this. We've had to be creatively, inventively making up things as we go along and as each each new hurdle of problem. Comes out as finding ways to work around. And it's been a it's it's really been a year of lots of ups and downs because there's been times where, you know, we felt fantastic that we you know, I said to Gerry Stefaniak when we first started. I think I don't know what we're going to be able to accomplish. It's like if we can just help one air cargo flight flip it about that by their flights later. We're still going out and doing maritime containers. But but after the. But after his success.

[00:14:35] **Unidentified** You run into new walls and new hurdles, and it's.

[00:14:41] **Speaker 1** That's where it's also been helpful to. Have these partnerships like working with on and then working with Rotary Club because you have you can become somewhat despondent when you feel like you're painting your head against a wall, filing the same paperwork over and over. Chasing down rabbit holes that go nowhere. But then when you have. Other people that are that are really committed. To the aid and support for Ukraine and bring to the table just a wide array of talents. I don't think we've encountered any problem thus far that we have been able to overcome. So that's been really. The remarkable part of the story, and I like to say. You know, I was at a point in my career as a radiologist where I was feeling somewhat really quite stagnant in what I was doing and not feeling like I was having the impact that I had always set out to have. So when I sort of stepped away from. From the career to. Focus on this. I gave up, you know, gave my profession. And luckily, I have a very understanding wife who is a very successful physician herself. But I like to say that it's the first time in my adult life where I've had no personal professional income myself, but probably the most gainfully employed I've ever been. So. The way I feel about.

[00:16:18] **Unidentified** The impact we're able to have. And you're traveling to Ukraine in the next few days.

[00:16:24] **Speaker 1** What are you hoping to accomplish? So. Since the war began. The for the type of I was a trauma surgeon, you know, or something like that. I think my skills.

[00:16:40] **Unidentified** You know, could be useful for over there for very often for.

[00:16:45] **Speaker 1** The get go. But I mean, I do my, my specialty is neuro radiology trauma, emergency radiology. But the reality is, is, uh, there's not even the imaging systems over there in the places where where they need it, where somebody like me with my clinical skills would be useful. So from the from the beginning, my the place where I was most useful was over here organizing, utilizing the resources that I had available through my family of physicians that had connections here in the US and and throughout the health care networks in the Ukraine and sort of building these partnerships. But over the course of the year, we've gotten to a point where some of our projects are really coming to a point of fruition where we need to build out some of the things on. On the other side in Ukraine. And we've got we've established enough of a of a foothold and networks there that we know who to meet with. We know we know who the key partners are. So part of it is to go over and as a couple of the bigger projects we're working are are really moving forward is to do one, be there and and and help see where we can maybe tweak it so that we're we're doing the right things so we can have a better idea of what we're doing on this and to make sure we're supporting the people in Ukraine as. As best we can or better than we currently are. But then also there's. There's something about being able to be with the people in person and to establish the relationships in the partnerships and person that. That happened. One of the first things I want to organize around when I get there is to to meet with a lot of, uh, some some our families, longtime family friends that are in health care community, but, uh, some are some of the partners that we've been working with. We are larger. All right. And some are are people aren't directly connected with like, let's say, the the minor project, but who are connected more with the work he's been doing. One of the main things we do is get everybody together and say, make sure everybody over there knows everybody over there and that they can collaborate, they can they can engage their own self-organization, because that's really what's what's happened over here is we all meet, we realize what our strengths are, and then we we figure out how we can collaborate and if there's any. We've we've been working with enough people over there to know who are the people that can get things done. But sometimes they're all working independently of one another, and sometimes they're in the yet different groups reinventing the same wheel. So if we can say to one group that's doing one thing, if you don't reinvent the wheel over here because they've already done it, just plug it. And that's that's sort of the major objective of going over at this point is to help some of the projects that are really coming together at this time, make sure they go through. Properly and then to see if we.

[00:20:20] **Unidentified** Can do more to build up the networks over there. To make sure that.

[00:20:25] **Speaker 1** Whatever we're sending over. Is being utilized and distributed to as and as as efficiently. It's possible to the people that needed the most. And after all of this, all of these moving parts and all of your hard work, what's it like to actually see? The people in Ukraine using these items that you've said? Well, that's what's really that's what keeps you going because. I. Since this. Like I'm not a morning person at all, but my eyes pop up because I've usually got already, you know, two dozen text messages because, you know, Ukraine's at hours ahead and I'm already getting messages from. From people abroad. I'm working with partners in the Netherlands who all their emails come through around 3 a.m. as they start their day. So. There's this. Sort of. I think all of us that work on this struggle with this constant feeling, it's like.

[00:21:32] **Unidentified** Are you doing enough by falling behind? And. And.

[00:21:38] **Speaker 1** So you're constantly thinking about what you need to be doing next. And it's one of the reasons why it's good for all of us sometimes to get out of the office and all get together. We go to Rotary Club meetings in Milwaukee. We had a good number of meetings at Chicago's because we all get focused in on what we're doing, and in a lot of times we're bringing our head against the wall, running up against hurdles, but then to reconnect with the people. And it's like, okay, let's take stock of what we have actually accomplished. Let's look at what we had done. It's like, okay. Step back and realize that, yeah, this is we may be running into some frustrating hurdles, but. It's not that big of a deal we've been up against worse. And one of the things that helps with that is when when we get the pictures of the videos, the feedback went on Hanya, you know, I'll be working on something and I'll get a flurry of texts or from her showing me, look here, the pictures of videos of this is showing up in and like really some of the most of the frontline. Locations that you can imagine where. We're where we we were. We had supplies arriving. At clinics in over the late summer fall is as the. And when when the Ukrainians were advancing retaking territories and when the they retreated from her southern region, some of our supplies were the first ones to show up at clinics, at that in hospitals that had just been re liberated. And those people had no other supplies other than that. I mean, the roads were some of the areas we get pictures of how the people who got in there had to traverse like bombed out roads. So when you get those types of feedback and when we talk to like the frontline combat physicians who tell us how how much it's saving lives and how they would otherwise be doing without. That. That that keeps you going.

[00:23:57] **Unidentified** Did you have any other.

[00:24:01] **Speaker 1** It's. Yeah. It's I guess as a. Do you have a massive question? I. I like to step back and put it in the larger perspective because we're working with a lot of different people and a lot. I think a lot of people recognize the humanitarian crisis here, but. I'm from and I'm from a Ukrainian family. But. I'd probably be doing this regardless. Because I come from a family that.

[00:24:39] **Unidentified** Father was in the Air Force. Brother and sister, Love.

[00:24:44] **Speaker 1** Foreign Service officers. The state. Who recognize the geopolitical.

[00:24:50] **Unidentified** Implications of this. And.

[00:24:53] **Speaker 1** And I would hope that Americans.

[00:24:57] **Unidentified** And more people throughout the free world. You know.

[00:25:01] **Speaker 1** You really recognize this for what it is, which is a battle for which way the arc of history bends and whether it continues to bend towards what I think all of us in the United States or not, squabbling amongst ourselves can agree with that idea that things like constitutional democracy and freedom and self-determination are all very important things. And honestly, I think we all potentially have a lot of lessons we can learn back here in the West by the example that that Ukraine is setting in terms of, you know, recognizing that fighting for that freedom and sovereignty and self-determination is an important thing and that they're not just paying lip service.

[00:25:45] **Unidentified** To it there, that they're literally putting their lives on the line and going up.

[00:25:51] **Speaker 1** Against a much larger and better armed aggressor.

[00:25:56] **Unidentified** And. And they are what I would call.

[00:26:01] **Speaker 1** The tip of the spear for her for democracy and freedom and self-determination. It might sound cliche to say that, but I think if. I think the historians will look back on this and how the West responds. And how they how we act to support.

[00:26:21] **Unidentified** Ukraine in all of this will. It'll be.

[00:26:26] **Speaker 1** Very consequential.

[00:26:28] **Unidentified** Where the arc of history. And how it bends.

[00:26:31] **Speaker 1** And I know that's a long, much bigger perspective than providing medical aid and humanitarian aid. But. But. But some people's motivations lie just in the humanitarian crisis. That's that's definitely where where our hearts are in it. But I would hope that others can see the larger scale of why this is important and why this war didn't. Vladimir Putin didn't start his war against the West. In Ukraine. And I like to say, I can tell you the day World War Three began. I can tell you where it was declared and it was declared by Vladimir Putin on September 11, 2013. In The New York Times. And you can look up the article that Vladimir Putin wrote. It's called A Plea to Caution has a Black Hand. And it was in in response to the the bazaar, Assad crossing the red line and using chemical weapons against the people of Syria that our administration had said would be a red line. And the US didn't really have an appetite for getting involved in another Middle East crisis. And we we our country hesitated. And Vladimir Putin used that opportunity to step in and call into question the exceptionalism of. Of the West and everything that we represent. They basically chided us for being the policeman of the world, which. Coming from anyone other than Vladimir Putin might have been, you know, a valid argument to contend with. But we celebrated Vladimir Putin doing that and a lot. And then when he offered that, he was going to take care of Syria. How did that work out? I was telling my family members, you know, for the past ten years that that that it wasn't a matter of if or when a matter of if it was simply a matter of when Vladimir Putin would come into Ukraine and turn cities. I used to say this over and over. He will turn cities in Ukraine to Aleppo to a lot like Aleppo, Syria. And they and the same generals that that laid waste to cities like Aleppo, like Homs. In Syria are the same ones that have laid waste to. Mariupol and other cities in the east of Ukraine. So if people think that they're that this is all just some country, you know, this is.

[00:29:05] **Unidentified** This is World War three, we just don't want to call it that yet. Yeah.

[00:29:13] **Speaker 1** Right in my gut for a second. I just need a 20 seconds tone with, like, all the fans around. Sure. So will be silent for 20 seconds starting now. And.