

UCOM

COMMUNICATOR

Winter 2024



**BUILDING A BRIGHT FUTURE FOR
OUR NEIGHBORS**

Braving Change

by: Erik Keener

For most of us change is difficult. Whether it's a new job, moving, an addition to the family, mourning the loss of a loved one, or just trying something different, any of these changes can be stressful and trying. Imagine the impact of dealing with all those changes, all at the same time, and not because you chose them, but because they were thrust upon you.

That was the hand Alexi* and his family had been dealt when they came to UCOM at the end of last year. Alexi is from Ukraine. Fleeing the terrible violence in his home country, Alexi made the impossible decision to uproot his family and move nearly 5,000 miles away to Michigan in search of safety and stability.

With a new baby in his family, a language barrier, and no friends or family in the area, Alexi was feeling the gravity of his family's exile as he walked through the door at UCOM. Thankfully, after a conversation with



UCOM staff, aided by Alexi's limited English and Google translate, we were able to provide food, clothing, and connections to even more resources to help support his young family.

Throughout his interaction with our staff members Alexi was floored by the support he received. Things we take for granted as essential services for our neighbors, providing fresh fruits, vegetables and other food, warm clothing for the coming winter, referrals to other agencies for further support, all seemed like small miracles to him. By the end of his visit, Alexi and several UCOM staff were in tears.

When Alexi moved his family away from his war-torn home, he made a change he hoped would be for the better. But the truth was that he didn't know what to expect when he came here. Without a support system of friends and family, his family's health and well-being were in doubt.



UCOM was able to provide Alexi and his family with a small amount of support during a tremendously difficult time in their lives and we will continue to do so as long as we are able. Change is hard. But sometimes it is also necessary.

UCOM too is embarking on a time of difficult change. After 21 years of thoughtful management, devoted leadership, and faithful service, our Executive Director, Rev. Dr. Bruce Roller, is retiring. Since 2003 Bruce has been the steady hand at the wheel of UCOM. Bruce has seen UCOM through both the tough times and the triumphs.

From the earliest stages of his tenure, when UCOM was still housed in the small dark basement of the Smith Memorial Church, Bruce has shepherded the organization through some dramatic changes. By directing the initiative to switch UCOM's food services to a client choice system, Bruce helped to completely overhaul the way our neighbors received support. In his pursuit of providing our neighbors with the most dignified and best experiences at UCOM Bruce



led the capital campaign that found us our current home. In expanding our physical space, Bruce helped UCOM to expand our programs as well. More recently his leadership helped UCOM create our culture of health policies that continue to guide everything we do.

For 21 years UCOM has had the truly great benefit of a compassionate, innovative, and energetic leader like Bruce. We are so grateful for everything he has accomplished in his decades of service and his legacy and impact on the organization and the community will be felt for years to come.

As we look forward, we too hope for a bright future. We know that there is still great work to be done in our community and people that need us. Entering the next chapter in our story, we trust that as UCOM supported Alexi during his difficult times, you, our friends and family, will continue to support UCOM.

****Alexi's name has been changed and photos are not of his family to protect their identities***



BRUCE ROLLER'S

Retirement

Let's celebrate Bruce and his leadership at UCOM over 20+ years!

22

MAR 2024

3:00-6:00
PM

United Church Outreach Ministry - East Wing
1311 Chicago Dr. SW, Wyoming, MI 49509

RSVP to Trisha at 616.241.4006 or
trisha.belbot@ucomgr.org



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YOU CAN HELP!

1. Join our Community Champions by making a recurring gift!
2. Donate healthy grains, pasta, or dried beans for the Healthy Choice Food Pantry.
3. Donate gloves and mittens for neighbors in need.
4. Share this newsletter with a friend!
5. Volunteer! We need weekly volunteers! Call Shawn for more info. 616-241-4006