

## Minnesota Now (MPR) | Minnesota Now Demand for limb prosthetics from Russian-Ukrainian war skyrockets 01GVNTRGTFNXP3QVRXRR8YYHN

TIM NELSON: Delegates from Ukraine are in Minnesota this week. The topic? The huge demand for limb prosthetics due to the Russian-Ukrainian war. The Ukrainian team is meeting with multiple organizations from the medical community here to figure out how to meet that demand.

Two people from that effort are on the line with us. Phil Hansen is President of Global Minnesota, a nonprofit promoting international understanding and engagement. And Yakov Gradinar is Chief Medical Officer of Minnesota-based Protez Foundation, which provides Ukrainians with free prosthetics.

Hey, thanks for being here.

**PHIL HANSEN:** It's great to be with you, Tim.

**YAKOV** Thank you for having us.

**GRADINAR:**

**TIM NELSON:** Phil, I'm going to start with you. How did you get this idea? And how did you get all these folks here?

**PHIL HANSEN:** Yeah, so Global Minnesota, about 70 years now, we've been a World Affairs Council, one of the biggest in the country. And one of our key programs is this program called our professional exchanges program. And we actually work with a number of national partners to get roughly 400 international visitors to Minnesota every year for professional exchanges.

Last year, roughly 100 countries participated with us. Some of those national partners include an organization called the Congressional Office of International Leadership. So the COIL Group, they work to build delegations of people to come to the United States for a professional exchange experience, that typically, they are then having a subject area that they're interested in. In this case, it was working with our Ukrainian group that's with us this week.

And they put it together into a package to be able to come here, and then they make Foreign Affairs Councils like ours aware of this possibility. We then prepare a customized itinerary back to them saying, here's the kinds of experiences these professionals would have where they to come to Minnesota. And if it looks like we're a good host for them-- and oftentimes Minnesota is selected because we have so many things to offer to these incoming groups-- then we are--

**TIM NELSON:** Yeah, I want to ask you a little bit about that.

**PHIL HANSEN:** Sure.

**TIM NELSON:** Minnesota, obviously, has a lot of medical technology here. Why are these-- why is this group coming to Minnesota? What's special about this state when it comes to prosthetics and our medical community?

**PHIL HANSEN:** Yeah, part of it is the fact that we have this tremendous group through Yakov and the Protez Foundation and the work that they have already been doing. And he can tell you some about that. But we also have the Limb Lab, Century College, Mayo Clinic, VA, a number of other partners that were available for visits. And the idea here that these are professionals that are already coming that have a high level of skill, they're trying to even take it up a further level.

And so we are creating opportunities for them. And you have to remember, it's also an exchange. They're sharing information with us. And we're learning from them. They're learning from us. And hopefully, when they go back to help their fellow countrymen and women, they're even more capable to be able to do so during this really difficult time in Ukraine.

**TIM NELSON:** And these folks are here through Saturday, I understand. How's the visit going? Any big exchanges and insights so far?

**PHIL HANSEN:** The visit has been phenomenal. We've had chances to have exchanges and evening events with them, too, to kind of decompress and hear the experiences that they're having. And they're learning a great deal. They're getting a lot of terrific connections.

And they're helping to build a global network of supports that will help them going into the future. And we're just very fortunate here in Minnesota to be a part of this. We are a place, a state, that is really sought after for these kinds of professional exchanges. And here we are helping, in our way, in this situation.

**TIM NELSON:** Now, Yakov, I understand you're Ukrainian American. You've lived in the US for about 15 years. This has got to feel deeply personal for you to see these folks coming.

**YAKOV GRADINAR:** Yes, Tim. Really, it feels very personal because, first of all, I grew up in Ukraine and came to the United States. And I was able to use this abundance of resource that we have and grow up professionally. And war started, and my parents, they live in Ukraine. My two brothers and two sisters still in Ukraine.

So for me was huge questions, like, how I can help. I can fly there. But how I can use all the resources that we have here, and that is a huge blessing. And I like to use any opportunity I have to share to Americans that thank you for building great country.

Thank you for paying taxes and building this abundance of resource, and not only that, but willingness to share, willingness to help. I even see in our fellow Ukrainians that when they come to the United States, it rubs off. And they even more generous to help other countries as well. So that is really awesome to be part of this and help Ukraine in this difficult time.

**TIM NELSON:** I want to focus a little here. Why is the Protez Foundation here? I know there's a substantial Ukrainian American community here. Why Minnesota?

**YAKOV GRADINAR:** So I live in Minnesota for 10 years. And when the war started, we started to think with Yury, with my family, with a lot of volunteers that join us Americans and Ukrainians. And we started to come up with this plan what we can do.

Ukrainian health system is overwhelmed. If we see normally seven, eight patients per day here, per day it's max, they probably see 20 to 20 per day. And in this very difficult time, how we can help them. So we decided to provide visas, travel expenses, temporary housing, meals, and help them with prosthetic help, help them mentally, give them a little vacation, and show them our care for Ukraine so they don't feel lonely.

So when they come back-- go back after three or four weeks back to Ukraine, they can bring that warmth and care that American society have for them. And that way, they don't see only on government level, but on simple American every day care that they get.

And they often tell me, we love how Americans don't know us and will stop and just say simple thank you for your service. That lives in us. So I actually came just from Ukraine last week. And I was able to see a lot of amputees that we took care of. And they smile when they start talking about United States. And that really--

**TIM NELSON:** That's great to hear.

**YAKOV** --touches me.

**GRADINAR:**

**TIM NELSON:** Give me a little sense of it. You talk about seeing the folks there. Give me a sense of how many people are in need of this kind of care over there. And how many people have come and gone from Minnesota and the United States so far?

**YAKOV** So need is huge. There is multiple different numbers. We heard from, like, 12,000 to 15,000 amputees that need  
**GRADINAR:** that care. Actually, when we created lists for people to register so we can take them here and gather information, we have over 780 people registered on our lists. And so far, we were able to help 56 amputees that we brought to United States, helped them here.

And some stayed, some went back, especially two boys stayed here, nine year and 12-year-old. And also, part of this also we were very touched when OpenWorld brought at least five specialists from Ukraine, and Global Minnesota was able to step up and organize everything.

And it was so nice to have them come and share experience and learn from them because they get the abundance of information as well and knowledge in this war. So that is awesome. And again, I'm very blessed to be part of this and be able to help our fellow Ukrainians and front line. And if you wouldn't mind, I will share a little two stories that--

**TIM NELSON:** We're running just about out of time here. I'm so glad to hear so many people that are getting helped and that we can show our care for the people of Ukraine. Thank you, both, and best of luck with your work.

**PHIL HANSEN:** Thank you. Thanks, Tim.

**YAKOV** Thank you.

**GRADINAR:**

**TIM NELSON:** I've been speaking with Phil Hansen, who is president of Global Minnesota, and Yakov Gradinar, who is chief medical officer of the Minnesota-based Protez Foundation.