Family reunites to start new life

Program brings Ukrainian workers to Saskatchewan

Mark Ferguson
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Andrey Vitkovskyy looks at the airport arrival screen.

The flight from Toronto on Saturday is 20 minutes late and Vitkovskyy is anxiously awaiting the arrival of his family from Ukraine. He hasn't seen his wife, Lilija, or his infant son, Kyrylo, since the baby was born four months ago.

"I'm very excited," he said.

Vitkovskyy moved to Saskatchewan in October to work as a machinist with a subsidiary of Hitachi Canadian Industries.

CREDIT: Greg Pender, The StarPhoenix

Andrey Vitkovskyy (left) shows off his four-month-old son, Kyrylo, to Audrey Langhorst Saturday at the Saskatoon airport

He's enjoying life in Canada very much, even the weather.

"It's not so cold here. Ukraine is cold, too," he said. "Saskatoon is very nice . . . very nice people."

Nine people arrived Saturday from Kyiv via Toronto, most of them family members joining those already in Saskatchewan as part of the Saskatchewan Immigration Nominee Program.

More than 500 Ukrainian immigrants have arrived in the province since 2006, with around 300 of those settling in Saskatoon. Most of those are married men with training as a welder, mechanic or driver -- good news for the provincial labour market.

"We're very excited to have them coming here," said Larry Flowers of Hitachi. "It's been a long road."

Flowers recruits Ukrainians to fill positions in Saskatchewan that might

otherwise remain vacant. Last year he flew to Kyiv to interview 26 applicants for 10 positions. He was at the airport Saturday welcoming a new machinist to join a growing team of immigrant workers at the plant.

"There's been lots of challenges," he said. "Language, understanding, integration. But there are some huge opportunities for them here."

The Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC) is helping families make the transition to life in Canada a bit easier.

"They know there's a better life for them here, for their family and their children" said Audrey Langhorst with the UCC immigration committee. "There's the culture shock and the language barrier, but they're doing so well."

Langhorst is a fourth generation Ukrainian. Her great-grandparents moved to the Prairies in the early 1900s and lived in a hut. Now, she's helping a new wave of immigrants to pay off loans, get a car, and some, she said, have already purchased a house.

"Saving is a big thing for most of them. They are very good at saving money."

Vitkovskyy worked hard to pay for his family to join him in Saskatoon. He thinks some things are much cheaper in Canada than Ukraine.

"Here, milk is cheap. At home, milk is very expensive compared to your wage."

He notices the flight has arrived and grabs the bouquet of flowers he brought for his wife.

Lilija walks through the gate with little Kyrylo. There are hugs and tears, but Vitkovskyy looks completely shocked. His little boy has grown so much already.

"He's so big!" he said.

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