

Students broaden Ukrainian horizons ...one computer at a time



By Brock Weir

Canadian students know the power of computers all too well.

Aurora student Sally Falk uses it to connect with friends, learn, and immerse herself in music. Nobleton's Anna-Sofia Lesiv also uses it to connect, but also as an outlet to share her thoughts with the world. But, when Anna returned this summer to visit family in her native Ukraine, the Soviet-era computers she saw being used by rural students struck her — and while struck with what was lacking, she also saw a window of opportunity to do something about it.

Rapidly advancing technology is something not readily available in the rural parts of the country, nor is it a priority for their government, says Anna, but it is a priority to her and Sally as they pool their talents, as well as the expertise of 11 local singers, artists, and artisans, to raise money to help bring schools into the 21st century.

“There isn't really a passion in the younger generation to have an interest in politics or what is going on in the country,” says Anna. “I thought that introducing something like computers and opening up kids to the internet might broaden their horizons a little bit and might interest them in developing a curiosity of learning that can put them on the path to greater involvement in the country.”

It is a worldview she holds close to her heart. The initiative is organized in part through *The Youth Informer*, an online magazine founded by Anna to engage young readers in national and international issues ranging from the Quebec Charter of Values to the crisis in Syria. She got the idea in 2008 in Grade 8 when the global financial crisis hit. The issue wasn't on her classmates' radar, so she wanted to make it relatable to them.

Now, writers range from 14 through to the second year of university and continues to grow.

While briefly attending Aurora High School before moving to a school in Richmond Hill, Anna connected with Sally. After their week-long acquaintanceship in Grade 9, they reconnected this summer on an educational trip at Laval University.

“We just ended up hitting it off,” says Sally, a Grade 11 student at AHS. “We became best friends instantly and the relationship just grew. When Anna showed me the photos and told me the stories of the schools, I just thought that this was a really great way to bring them out of this despair with computers.”

Sally has been spearheading bringing the entertainment together for what they call a “really cosy atmosphere” for the coffee house with talented artists, singers, and even an artist making wallets out of duct tape. In organizing the event, they say they are trying to bring together two spheres — the local youth arts community, and the other sphere halfway around the world.

?Throughout the night we're going to introduce different stories on how a computer can really help someone and we hope that will have an impact on our guests,? says Anna. ?I think that seeing really talented, young performers will also be a point to consider the talent and potential that [Ukrainian] youth have. Seeing this visually in front of you through the art they create or the performances they make can show exactly how much potential we really have and how a computer can really further that in a different part of the world.?

The coffee house will be held at the Aurora Cultural Centre on Saturday, November 2, thanks to sponsorship from Josh Hook of the band Tokyo Police Club who helped secure the room, and provided much needed seed money to get the event going. With tickets at \$5 apiece, Sally says they're aiming to get 100 friends, young music fans, and everyone else into the room to take part.

?This is an evening for people to come and see this beautiful space, listen to friends from school and people you have never met play awesome songs and read their poetry,? says Sally. ?We're would be happy with 100, but it is like shooting for the moon with us for our first event. We're still very small, but that would be our ultimate goal to get out 100 youth and really make that connection.?

All money raised will be going to purchase computers in the Ukraine. Although donations of used computers would be greatly appreciated, the girls want to also help the Ukrainian economy by doing business on the ground.

For more information on the event, visit www.theyouthinformer.com.