

When Faith and Engineering Converge

By Ash Hobbs, P.E.

Imagine the opportunity to travel to a remote site in a foreign country, where no one speaks your language, to live in a tent with no running water, and to provide engineering services for buildings that are 70 years old. Oh, and did I mention that you'd provide all your engineering work for free? That's right, pro-bono.

Longtime SEAI member, Keith Jones (AHJ Engineers), had such an opportunity last spring when he traveled to the Ukraine to provide engineering services on 5 separate buildings, all in various stages of disrepair, at a drug and alcohol rehab work center in Turbov.

It is all part of the Church of the Nazarene's Extreme Ministries, in what they affectionately call the Extreme Makeover, Ukraine Edition.

"I was approached by Doug Tibbs of Extreme Ministries last year, who needed professional advice to determine if the project was feasible. I was immediately interested and didn't hesitate to get involved" Keith said.



Erection of a "pole barn" structure at the rehab work center in Turbov.

"Several of the buildings were in really bad shape," Keith continued. "In one building, we had to completely remove the roof structure and

replace it with a steel truss system. They didn't want to bear the trusses on the existing stone walls, so we had to support each truss on new isolated columns."

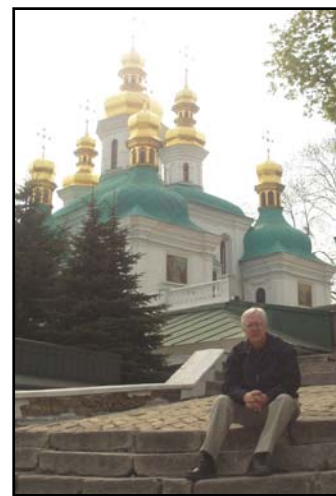
"In another building, the floor was in such bad shape we had to remove it and replace it with a slab on grade," Keith said.

"All the building materials are pretty much the same as we have here: Wood, concrete, steel, and light gauge studs." He then added with a grin, "the biggest difference is that all their buildings are roofed with corrugated asbestos tiles."

So, what was the hardest part of the trip? Was it the 48 hours of travel? Or, living out of a tent for two weeks? "The most difficult part was the language barrier. We had several really great translators that had to help us out a lot there."

Finally, reflecting on his experience, Keith added, "My faith plays an important part in my life, and this was a great opportunity for me to use my talents to do His work."

The group plans to expand their work to two sites in Argentina in the near future.



Longtime SEAI member, Keith Jones, visits a Greek orthodox monastery in Kiev.