

800 DAYS IN MOLDOVA

The average U.S. Peace Corps volunteer spends about 800 days serving in a foreign country.

September, 2016 • News and activities in Rîșcani, Republic of Moldova • Mark Gilchrist, U.S. Peace Corps volunteer.

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The Phoenix Centre in Rîșcani celebrates and raises money to continue helping children with disabilities. Photos: [Click](#)

Children with disabilities are gems of our future

Communities thrive when they realize that their children who have physical or mental disabilities will someday become adults with disabilities, and that, with a little help, they can become productive adults who contribute to the community.

They also know that if children with disabilities are not helped – as during Soviet times – then the community must support them throughout their lives.

That is the philosophy behind the vision of Victoria Dunford, who believes that people with disabilities ultimately want to contribute to their communities.

A Rîșcani native, Victoria Scutaru moved to the Isle of White and married Englishman John Dunford. In 2012, she founded MAD-Aid (Make A Difference), an NGO that transports used or discarded medical equipment from the United Kingdom to Moldova.

In the years since, MAD-Aid volunteers and partners have brought tons of wheelchairs, beds, tables and other valuable medical equipment here, and have distributed it to those who need it most.

After visiting the Tony Hawks

Center in Chisinau, (see story.)

Dunford knew there was a great

need for a similar facility in northern

Moldova, so she took on a massive challenge of converting an old kindergarten into a school for children with disabilities.

The modern facility is handicap-accessible, with an



Children play during opening of an accessible playground at the Phoenix Centre. Photos: [Click](#)

accessible playground and bathrooms, and the longest wheelchair ramp and newest elevator in the district.

Phoenix Centre documents estimate that there are about 646,000 people with disabilities throughout Moldova, up to 1,440 in the city of Rîșcani, and possibly three times that many in the district.

Opened in September, 2015, the Phoenix staff celebrated its first birthday this September, with a fundraising gala that attracted more than 100 donors from around the country.

The evening event, held at the facility off Strada Tatarbanar was memorable and exciting. Titled; “Gypsies are found near heaven,” patrons learned about the

Roma culture here, through songs and beautiful dances by the student dance group: „Mostenitorii.”

The centre enters its second year with an ambitious expansion to its second phase of operation. Construction has begun on a residential facility for elderly, that should help the centre support itself.

The Invisibles –

Many people with disabilities stay in their homes all day, because their handicaps make it difficult, or impossible, to travel, or because they are embarrassed.

This problem was compounded here during the Soviet era, when people with disabilities were hidden in institutions. Leaders of that utopian construct denied that disabilities existed.

This only makes the problem worse, as people with disabilities are rarely seen here – they become invisible – and so the community will wrongly believe that there is not a problem.

Facilities like the Phoenix Centre will help remove those barriers and more, and will help people with disabilities contribute to their communities.

“People with disabilities represent a critical talent pool that is underserved and underutilized.”

Shirley Davis

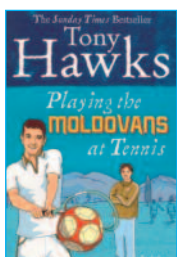
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Tony Hawks; the book, centre & movie

Moldovans with disabilities can thank a single soccer match for the improved care they receive here.

In 1997, the story goes, British author Tony Hawks saw his country's soccer team beat Moldova. He chided the opponents, and bet his friend that he could beat every Moldovan team member at tennis.

Hawks visited Moldova, locating, challenging and playing the men at his strongest sport. He fell in love with



Moldovans, with one Moldovan family, and with Moldovans with disabilities.

He adopted a facility for children with handicaps, enlarged it and still supports it.

The Tony Hawks Centru is a national leader in treating and caring for people with disabilities, and has inspired people to give this important issue

the attention it deserves. Watch the Movie: [Click](#)



In September, I spent three days near Costești for **Imagine Rîșcani**, and visited nine beautiful villages. Over the next several weeks, I will publish photos of; Damașcani, Duruitoarea, Proscurea, Costești, Avrameni, Braniște, Reteni, Pascauti and Petruseni.

Photos: [Click](#)

JOKE OF THE MONTH

A nine-year-old boy disappeared after applying a cream that; “Makes you look 10 years younger.”

First Bells ring for students

In Moldova, it's easy to remember the school calendar, as schools everywhere always start classes on September 1 and end them on May 31.

Those are very special days, as the students dress up in beautiful clothes, bring flowers for their teachers, and assemble early in the morning for a celebration of education, with song, dance, and... announcements!



At the Liviu Damian school. Photos: [Click](#)

Rîșcani celebrates “Hram”

Most cities and villages in Moldova celebrate one day each year as their “Hram” or church day, or often celebrated as their birthday. In Rîșcani, Sept. 21 started with bicycle races, and then a motorcycle show, and it all ended with a concert and fireworks.



Happy Birthday Rîșcani! Photos: [Click](#)

MOLDOVAN OF THE MONTH



ALEXANDRU GAVRILUC

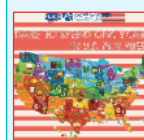
Alexandru Gavriluc was born in 1926 near here, in Malinovscoe. He joined the Russian Army in World War II, and served for seven years in the Pacific.

He earned medals including the Order of the Patriotic War, Second Degree.

At age 91, he lives in Rîșcani with his wife, and likes to play chess with his friends.

Photographs and videos, at:

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