

# 'I feel at home here': Utah tech community welcomes 18 Ukrainian companies

Gathering direct result of Utah delegation's effort to build business ties with war-torn Ukraine



Yaroslav Fisiuk, a business development manager from Ukraine, speaks to attendees at the eighth annual Silicon Slopes Summit at the Delta Center in Salt Lake City on Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023.

Jeffrey D. Allred, Deseret News

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Yaroslav Fisiuk works with a software development company where about

95% of its more than 300 developers are based in war-torn Ukraine.

[S-PRO](#) was founded 10 years ago in the city of Zaporizhzhia, located in the southeastern part of the country, a mere 40 miles from what is now the front line of Ukraine's ongoing war with Russia.

It's among the "hardest places to stay" nowadays, Fisiuk said, as the fighting rages on.

But this week, Fisiuk — along with representatives from 17 other Ukrainian tech companies — touched down in Utah to mingle with the state's tech community, first at a [showcase event](#) on Tuesday at The Outpost in Salt Lake City, then at the [Silicon Slopes Summit](#) at the Delta Center, which attracted over 10,000 attendees to network with Utah-based and global tech and business leaders.

Fisiuk said Utah may be a small state, but its warmth and support to Ukrainians is unmatched.

"I feel at home here," he said from the Silicon Slopes event Thursday. "All the people of Utah, they are so friendly, they are so open. They have a very strong will to help."

The gathering of 18 Ukrainian tech companies, totaling some 30 Ukrainians, was a direct result of a [Utah group's visit to Ukraine](#) in May, which was the first state trade and humanitarian trip to the country amid the conflict with Russia.

The delegation, organized by World Trade Center Utah in partnership with the Utah-based nonprofit August Mission, brought a 30-person contingent of state officials, business leaders and humanitarian representatives into a war zone to foster a deeper relationship with Ukraine during its darkest time

while also exploring business opportunities in the aerospace and defense, technology, and agricultural sectors. The Deseret News was there to [document its efforts](#).



Yaroslav Fisiuk, a business development manager from Ukraine, waits to speak to attendees at the eighth annual Silicon Slopes Summit at the Delta Center in Salt Lake City on Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023.

To conclude the trip, leading members of the group unexpectedly landed a [face-to-face meeting with Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy](#) to discuss how Utah can help support and even rebuild Ukraine without waiting for the war to end.

“When we asked, ‘How can we help,’ (Zelenskyy) asked us to create jobs here. ‘Help us employ Ukrainians. We need to keep our economy going,’” Jonathan Freedman, who has since succeeded Miles Hansen as president

and CEO of World Trade Center Utah, told the Deseret News on Thursday. His comments came while he was mingling with Ukrainian tech representatives at the Silicon Slopes Summit.

"That was our main motivation, building economic ties between Ukraine and Utah, and it remains our focus today," Freedman said. He added he was "thrilled" to see those relationships continue to build at this week's events.

"This is one more step as we continue forward," Freedman said. "I think Utah can continue to make a significant difference in Ukraine, especially as we look forward to Ukraine's reconstruction and redevelopment."

From the tech sector, delegation members Owen Fuller, CEO of the Utah software company Marq, and Tiffany Vail, co-founder and COO of the Traveltech platform Wander, organized Tuesday's event to create networking opportunities for Ukrainian tech companies and workers. They also helped bring the Ukrainian visitors to the two-day Silicon Slopes Summit to give them more opportunity to mingle with other members of the tech sector for possible job opportunities and investors.

"They've made a ton of great connections with Utahns here, and we're excited to see that progress and for these relationships to continue," Fuller said. "These are really great, entrepreneurial, talented people, and we see a lot of similarities in each other (between Utahns and Ukrainians)."

Fuller said Ukraine has an "incredibly talented workforce of software engineers in particular," which makes up about 5% of the country's GDP. "They're very proficient, have a great reputation, and actually have been doing with and for Utah companies for a long time already.

"You know, we need to help those people have good jobs," Fuller said. "That flows through and helps fund everything else that we're doing and helps

them to be able to take care of what they need for their families."

Vail said everyone should be "doing our part in this unprovoked and unjust war," and it makes sense for Utah's tech sector to partner with Ukraine's because it has "some of the brightest tech minds."

"So it's a very natural fit for them to come here. What we have, unlike anyone else, is an ecosystem of entrepreneurs who have built companies, created unicorns, sold companies and built again," Vail said. "And if we can teach them to do that, we'll be creating generational wealth, which is what this is about. It's not just about helping one person and moving along. It's about how we create a bigger difference for a longer period of time, and that comes from creating generational wealth and teaching them how to do it."

This week wasn't the first time Fisiuk has come to Utah. In fact, he also visited in August, after a meeting with Fuller and other members of the Utah delegation in Poland on their way home from Ukraine. Fisiuk was already thinking about opening an office in the U.S. for S-PRO, but after meeting with Fuller and other members of the group, he began asking himself whether he should do it in Utah.

Turns out, Fisiuk chose Utah. He has already registered the company with the U.S. and opened shop at Kiln, a coworking office space, in Salt Lake City. He plans to move from Ukraine to Utah by the end of this year.

"Now we're here," he said. "And we will get started."

## Utah Tech for Ukraine

Tuesday's event, Vail said, was "incredible." It included remarks from Utah Senate President Stuart Adams, R-Layton, who led Utah's delegation in May, focused on how and why Utah is supporting Ukraine, as well as comments from Freedman on why Utah is a great place to do business. Dmytro Kushneruk, consul general of Ukraine based in San Francisco, also gave an update on the situation on the ground in Ukraine before Fuller highlighted each of the 18 companies that had come to visit during two panel discussions.

"We were hopeful to just make some kind of a change and just start something, have maybe six or seven companies come and we would have thought that was a success," Vail said. "And we had 18 companies show up."

In total, about 80 people attended Tuesday's showcase. In addition to the 30 Ukrainians, Vail said about 50 came from Utah, including sponsors and possible investors. She said it's difficult to predict how much might be invested as a result of the showcase, "but we do have a couple of big companies" that expressed interest in investing in some Ukrainian companies.

Companies including the Utah Jazz, Pluralsight, AppGlo, Thread Wallets, Minky Couture, Kizik, Built Bar, Pillow Cube, Marq, Wander, Hallo, Gravel and Sharehouse sponsored the event, along with NAZOVNI with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, the Consulate General of Ukraine in San Francisco, World Trade Center Utah, and the IT Ukraine Association, according to the event's website.

Together the sponsors donated thousands of dollars to make Tuesday's event possible, though Ukrainian companies were expected to cover their own airfare and hotel accommodations while in Utah.

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