

## NEWS/RELIGION

# Photographer Haritan to share images, personal experience with Chernobyl

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Photographer Michael Haritan, a self-described “man with a mission,” could speak about that mission for hours.

His presentation at 5 p.m. today at the Hultquist Center and lecture at 9 a.m. Friday at the Methodist House, as part of the Men's Club Speaker Series, won't be that long. But the talks, fitting into Week Four's theme of “Russia and the West,” will chronicle Haritan's two trips to Chernobyl through photos and let him share what he's learned about radioactivity.

Haritan has worked as a photographer for over 30 years. Before he embarked on a trip teaching English to middle school students in Ukraine in 2016, he learned that the nuclear reactor that caused the infamous Chernobyl explosion 30 years



**HARITAN**

prior would soon be covered by a protective steel dome.

“I felt, as a professional photographer, that I have a responsibility to historians to provide professional quality photos,”

Haritan said, “so they can be used as a reference for generations to come.” During his first Ukraine trip, Haritan found a certified guide to take him through Chernobyl, and he snapped around 800 photos within six hours around the site.

Also giving him a photographic sense of urgency was the fact that, he said, nature is overwhelming the Chernobyl area. Trees, vines and shrubs are slowly but surely settling into the areas people can't.

While there, Haritan said, he realized “there was a story to be told to different audiences.”

The first “audience” he

wanted to reach was first responders in the United States, who Haritan thought he could help prepare for a potential nuclear disaster in America.

“(Ukrainians) had experienced two World Wars, with Nazis marching through with their tanks, but there was a recovery,” Haritan said. “There was a fall of the Soviet Union. ... this was a totally unknown challenge to them, and a new situation to deal with.”

Haritan hopes that, through his photos and lectures, he can help inform people in the United States and those abroad so they can be more prepared should another nuclear disaster strike. He also wanted to reach Ukrainian church and social service groups, as well as universities and high schools.

In the last 18 months, Haritan has delivered his presentation on the Cher-

nobyl nuclear disaster and its consequences 25 times to 15 different Ukrainian groups. He's also spoken to chemical engineering, environmental science and AP Physics students.

Six weeks ago, Haritan returned to Chernobyl and nearby Pripjat, Ukraine. This time, he had a different mission: speak with people who returned to live there after the disaster.

According to Haritan, permanent habitation in the Chernobyl area won't be safe for at least 20,000 years, but that hasn't stopped people from resettling there.

On his most recent trip, he met with six women in their 80s and 90s who have returned to the affected area against the Ukraine government's wishes.

“I felt privileged, as a photographer and historian, to actually photograph and listen to the stories of



SUBMITTED PHOTO

One of Michael Haritan's photos from June 2016 shows the abandoned amusement park in Pripjat. Haritan will discuss his work at 5 p.m. today in the Hultquist Center.

these people that will not be around 10 to 20 years from now,” Haritan said. “And no one will ever be there to replace them.”

Haritan said he wishes those born after 1986 would learn more about history, but more specifically, how world events rarely just affect the local populations where they occur.

Still, Haritan is optimistic about the future of nuclear science. He thinks that, giv-

en all the advances in studying radioactivity since Marie Curie began her work, similar progress can be made in the next century.

“If that was all done in science in the last 100 years, then what's encouraging to me is our future scientists who will be able to harness that energy and use it in a respectable, safe, constructive way,” Haritan said. “That's my challenge to them.”