

## **COMMUNITIES; In Millburn, The Accent Is Russian**

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### **Body**

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ON a third-floor window of a corner building, high above the thrum of Audis and Jaguars cruising the length of **Millburn** Avenue, is a painted silhouette of a couple and the words Royal Ballroom.

Yet Alex and Tanya Koulik, **Russian** immigrants who opened the studio here four years ago -- one of four that they own -- are among a large influx of Russians who have immigrated to this affluent pocket of Essex County over the last 20 years.

That surge has given this township of 19,765 the distinction -- along with Fair Lawn in Bergen County -- of having the highest percentage of residents of **Russian** descent in the state at 11.7 percent. By comparison, only 2.3 percent of New Jersey's 8.4 million residents are **Russian**.

Just why so many new -- and not particularly wealthy -- immigrants would feel comfortable in one of the most exclusive towns in North Jersey, where the median household income is \$130,848 and housing prices often begin at a half-million dollars, has to do with more than just the tango.

"I don't know what most Russians will tell you why they live in this **community**," said Mr. Koulik, a lithe man of 44, "but I believe the major reason is the schools."

The Kouliks say they moved to an apartment in Short Hills in 1997, five years after coming to this country, because they wanted their son, Vitali, now 21 and a four-time ballroom dancing champion, to attend **Millburn** High School, ranked among the top public schools in the country. So did the families of two of the Kouliks' students, Michael Lubavin and Yelena Vaynshteyn.

"For us, the main attraction was the school system, especially the **Millburn** High School," said Mr. Lubavin, a 19-year-old sophomore at Columbia University.

As for Ms. Vaynshteyn, 24, a dental student at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, she said her mother moved to Short Hills 11 years ago from Brooklyn because of the school system.

Keith Neigel, the principal at the high school, said in an interview that while the number of **Russian** students reached a peak in the mid-1990's, 27 of the school's 1,073 students still spoke **Russian** at home.

"Many Russians are highly educated and left good jobs, Mr. Neigel said, "and although it took time for them to get similar positions in the United States, they have moved up the economic ladder quickly."

For instance, Mr. Lubavin's father eventually found work as an engineer in Springfield. Ms. Vaynshteyn's father and mother, dentists in Russia, now practice in Brooklyn.

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And while the Kouliks were always light on their feet, dancing was not always their day job. In Moscow, Mr. Koulik was a neurosurgeon and his wife a university English teacher, professions they could not practice when they first arrived in America. Dance champions in Europe, they turned to ballroom dancing, first as instructors in Verona and later opening their own.

The first wave of Russian immigrants came in the early 1980's after the Soviet Union began easing Jewish immigration, the second in 1989 as it dissolved.

In northern New Jersey, the first stop for Soviet Jews was often Newark, said Rabbi Mendel Bogomilsky of the Chai Center for Living Judaism, an Orthodox congregation here. Many settled in a sprawling apartment complex in the Ivy Hill section, where his father, Samuel, the spiritual leader of Mount Sinai Temple, helped get them services, Rabbi Bogomilsky said.

In addition, the Jewish Counseling and Service Agency, now known as the Jewish Family Service of Metro West, helped resettle many Soviet immigrants in the early 1980's, and one of its busiest offices was in Millburn. In the second wave, the agency resettled nearly 3,000, said Sheila Muster, the agency's director of operations.

"Those first people that came started working and as they prospered they moved to places like Springfield, West Orange, and Millburn-Short Hills," Ms. Muster said. As a result, the surrounding towns also have large percentages of Russians: West Orange, (5.8 percent) Livingston (9.8 percent) and Springfield (10.3 percent.)

Rabbi Steven Bayar of Congregation B'nai Israel, a Conservative congregation here and one of many in the area that offered a support network for the newcomers, said many Russian families rented apartments in Millburn before they had enough saved to buy a house.

"We know families would move out of Millburn as soon as the kids were old enough, Rabbi Bayar said, "because they didn't need the high school anymore" -- nor the high cost of living.

Mr. Lubavin said when his family arrived in America nine years ago, an uncle in Livingston helped them to settle in a garden apartment complex across from the high school here along with many other Russians. To help make ends meet, his mother earned a degree from Kean University and found work as an accountant. Soon the family was able to buy a house in neighboring Springfield as Michael was finishing middle school here.

"The housing in Springfield was cheaper, and we wanted to buy a house," said Mr. Lubavin.

Like the Lubavins, the Kouliks also found it more expedient to leave their small apartment in Short Hills for larger quarters in Springfield. "Vitali already graduated and we needed a little bigger place," Mr. Koulik explained.

These days, Ms. Vaynshteyn and her fiance can be seen gliding across the blond wooden floor of the Royal Ballroom as they try to master dance steps for their wedding reception in six months.

"We wanted a nice first dance," said Ms. Vaynshteyn. "Tanya is a great instructor, and she's very smiley and she's very encouraging. We need a lot of encouragement."

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## Graphic

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Photo: Alex Koulik was a neurosurgeon in Russia, and now runs a dance studio in Millburn. He dances with Pat Gabriel. (Norman Y. Lono for The New York Times)

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