

# Family celebrates freedom during Festival of Lights

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Although in their fifties and lifelong Jews, this married couple hasn't been able to participate in many Hanukkah celebrations. This is because Evgeniy Kats, 55, and his wife, Nina Lebedinskaya, 53, lived in Ukraine, which, until 1991, was part of the USSR.

"It was only in the last 10 years or so in our country that we have had the freedom to more openly celebrate the Jewish holidays and Judaism," says Kats. It wasn't until the politics of the country changed, and a rabbi from New York came to lead their synagogue in Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine's third largest city, that they learned the joy of this festive holiday and other Jewish traditions, he said.

"While under Russian control, Jews were discriminated against and were fearful to practice their religion. Even today, anti-Semitism persists in many ways, even though Ukraine is now an independent republic."

Kats and Lebedinskaya, however, are no longer worried about expressing their beliefs. The couple, their youngest son, Andrey Lebedinsky, 15, and Kats' mother, Riva Kats, 78, now live in Southfield. They immigrated to the United States this past January.

"The first thing I noticed here is that everybody smiles; even strangers offer smiles. This is not true in the Ukraine. Also, there is so much freedom here and there is the chance to reach your goals in America."

Lebedinskaya, who wears a constant smile herself, agrees with her husband. Her smile expands as she tells about how excited she is to celebrate their first Hanukkah in their new country. She says they are joining relatives, including their oldest son, Dmitriy Lebedinsky, 30, who came to America in 1999 for a celebration dinner at Nikolay and Lynn Lebedinskaya's home in West Bloomfield. Nikolay is Nina's brother.

Lebedinskaya explains why

there are so many different spellings of her last name. "I kept my maiden name in memory of my parents when I married my husband. Our boys were also given this last name, but the male version of it." Her brother shortened the name when he and his family came to this country nine years ago.

One of the reasons they came to America was to provide Andrey with more educational opportunities - he's now studying English at Oakland Community College. Also, they hoped to enjoy all the freedoms and financial benefits their new country has to offer. When living in the Ukraine, Kats, an electronic engineer, and Lebedinskaya, a bookkeeper, earned a combined income of \$60 a month. It took almost three-quarters of their income to pay the rent on a 580-square-foot apartment to house the five-member family.

"Our new apartment is three times larger, which is quite a luxury," says Lebedinskaya. Kats, with a twinkle in his eyes and an enormous smile on his face, adds that one of the best new luxuries they have is the dishwasher. "In Ukraine, I helped my wife by washing and drying the dishes by hand!"

Although unable to work in the fields in which they were educated, Kats is a carpet estimator and his wife, a childcare provider. They say, however, that they feel good that they have been able to find work in their adopted country.

They are also pleased that health care is so available and medical technology is so advanced in this country.

Because of this, Riva, who broke her hip in a fall more than two years ago, has been able to get a hip replacement that care is unavailable to most. "In Ukraine, even if we had had money for this surgery, (medical costs are so exorbitant that care is unavailable to most), it was not an option because of my mother's age," says Kats. "Also, Ukraine lacks the medical technology, drugs and supplies."

Riva Kats, although still using a walker, is looking forward to helping with the

## Celebration planned

The Kats-Lebedinskaya family, as well as other Russian Jews, has the opportunity to celebrate Hanukkah with a distinct Russian flavor. The Jewish Federation's Russian Division is planning a night of latkes (a traditional Hanukkah dish) and vodka 5-8 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 1, at the Jewish Community Center in West Bloomfield.

The evening commemorates the rededication of the ancient Temple of Jerusalem, which was reclaimed after the victory of the Maccabees over the Hellenistic Syrians. Although there was only enough sacramental oil to last one day, it miraculously burned for eight days. This year, Hanukkah begins at sundown on Friday, Nov. 29.

In addition to vodka shots and mini latkes, a festive dinner will be served, followed by entertainment by Ben Openegyn on the keyboard. The cost of the evening, which is limited to those 21 and older, is \$30 per person. Guests are asked to bring a gift (\$10 or less) for a child in need.

For more information and reservations for this event, call David Contorer, (248) 203-1490.

Hanukkah meal. She and her daughter-in-law plan to make desserts to take to the festivities: Nina her shredded cake and Riva, her Napoleon cake.

The women say they enjoy cooking and baking in their larger kitchen, which includes a microwave oven and a food processor - both luxuries in their native land. Kats says he doesn't care about these luxuries, although he helps with the cooking and also joins his wife in preserving fruits and vegetables. He just looks forward to the end result.

"It's more fun to eat than cook!"



Nina Lebedinskaya (center) serves Hanukkah treats to her husband, Evgeniy Kats, and mother-in-law, Riva.

## Recipes with a Russian flair

### NINA'S SHREDDED CAKE

3 1/2 cups all-purpose flour  
1 1/2 cups sugar  
3 eggs  
1/2 teaspoon baking soda  
1/2 tablespoon vinegar  
1 cup margarine, melted  
15 drops (about 2 teaspoons) vanilla extract  
1 cup applesauce

Sift flour into a bowl and mix in the sugar. Make a well in the center and add eggs, baking soda that has been mixed with vinegar, margarine and vanilla extract. Mix the ingredients together thoroughly until smooth.

Divide dough into two parts: Larger part is 2/3 of dough; smaller part, 1/3 of dough. Place the dough in the freezer for about 1 hour. Grease 9-inch square cake pan. Shred the larger part of dough in bottom of pan. Spread applesauce over it. Shred smaller part of dough on top.

Bake at 350°F for about 25-30 minutes, until golden brown. Cut cake while it is hot.

Makes nine servings

### NAPOLEON CAKE

Dough:  
2 1/2 cups milk  
2 tablespoons vegetable oil  
1 tablespoon vinegar  
1 teaspoon baking soda  
1/4 cup water  
2 eggs  
2 1/4 cups flour  
Cream filling:  
6 cups milk  
6 tablespoons flour  
1 cup sugar  
20-25 drops (about 2-1/2 teaspoons) vanilla extract  
Confectioner's sugar

Put milk, oil, vinegar, baking soda, water and eggs into a bowl. Mix thoroughly while adding flour until soft and smooth. Divide dough into seven equal parts. Roll each part into a ball. Using a rolling pin, roll out to form circles of same approximate size. Place circles on baking sheets and bake each at 350°F for 7-10 minutes, until golden brown.

While dough is baking, make filling by putting all ingredients in a bowl. Mix thoroughly.

Place on circle of dough on a serving dish and spread with filling. Repeat with remaining dough and filling. Top with remaining dough. Shift confectioner's sugar on top. Place cake in refrigerator and chill 1-1 1/2 hours before serving.

Makes 12 servings

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