

PROFILE



NEWSDAY PHOTO / ALAN RAJA

MARINA KOVALYOV

Founder and president of the Russian American Arts Foundation, a not-for-profit organization that sponsors the annual Russian Heritage Week celebration in June. Honored by the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs during Immigrant History Week 2005 (April 11). Co-founder and vice president of Firebird Group, a Manhattan public relations and marketing agency, specializing in the Russian-American community. Member of the board of directors of the Council of Jewish Emigre Community Organizations and of the Shorefront YM-YWHA in Coney Island.

BIOGRAPHY

Native of St. Petersburg, Russia, where she was an art historian and museum curator before moving to New York City 25 years ago. Her first job was an assistant curator at the Brooklyn Museum. Later received a master's degree in political science from Hunter College. Founded the Russian American Arts Foundation 12 years ago. Lives on Manhattan's East Side. Re-married three years ago and has one daughter.

PROUD OF

"Three years ago, together with the Daily News and the mayor's office, the foundation started the first annual Russian Heritage Week. It is a very special celebration that takes place mostly in Brooklyn, but brings people together from all over the city because the Russian-speaking community is so spread out now. This is a large event that starts in June and one of the highlights is a huge festival on June 5, at Asser Levy Park, off Ocean Parkway at Seabreeze Avenue. There will be Russian food and entertainment for adults as well as children. Last year, we had 30,000 that came from all over the city to join us and celebrate Russian art and culture."

COMMITMENT

"I feel so fortunate. When I left Russia, it was really an escape, because that was the way it was at the time. So I was really thankful, and I continue to be thankful, to this wonderful land. For me, it's not just a phrase; it's a fact of life. I was able to come to the country where I knew no one and go on to achieve things that weren't even in my dreams. I was able to provide for my daughter, including the best education. We were the first generation of newcomers from Russia, and to be able to accomplish what we have says a lot about what opportunities were available to us here."

FOCUS

"To see that the [Russian American Arts] foundation continues to reach out to more and more people . . . and the fact that the mayor's office recognized me is a reflection of the entire Russian-American community. We should all be proud of what we have been able to accomplish in this country."

— SHEILA MCKENNA