

The Russian-speaking Communities
of
Ann Arbor and the Detroit Suburbs



A Brief Guide for Students
by
Michael Makin

General

Twenty years ago, Russian was heard relatively rarely on the streets of Ann Arbor and the Detroit suburbs. Now, as in so many other parts of the world, it is **commonly heard**, and is spoken by a very wide range of people, from short-term visitors to permanent residents, from ethnic Russians to people from distant parts of the former Soviet Union, from refugees to computer scientists and students from prosperous Moscow families. Keeping up to date on the shape of the local Russophone communities is almost impossible. This is just a general guide. Always call before heading to any of the businesses listed below. One of the best places for up-to-date information on events and businesses is the web site **Russian Michigan Online** (<http://russianmichigan.com/>), where the “yellow pages” contain listings for many Michigan businesses of interest to the Russian speaker.

Ann Arbor has a significant and growing population **of native speakers of Russian**, many of them visitors associated with the University, others permanently settled here. The latter often consist of extended families -- retired grandparents, working parents, and children -- so that you will find Russian-speakers in **many parts of the city**, from schools to hospitals, from stores to businesses and the University itself. Quite a few elderly Russians live on the north-east side of Ann Arbor, and the supermarkets there (on Plymouth Road) are places where Russian is frequently heard. At the other end of town, **Hiller's** supermarket, in the Arborland Shopping Mall on Washtenaw at US 23 has a significant “international” section, where a good (although unpredictable) selection of Russian and Russian-style products may be obtained.

In 2003 Ann Arbor's first Russian grocery store opened: **Euro Market**, 3108 Packard Road; 734-975-4326; keeps regular business hours. Euro Market is smaller than the stores of the Detroit suburbs, but it offers a good line of Russian and other Eastern European foodstuffs, a limited number of publications and electronic media, some Russian medications, and the usual range of souvenirs. It is also a good source for information about events and businesses in the local Russophone community.

For Ann Arbor's Russian speakers there are two community organizations of especial significance: **Washtenaw County Jewish Community Center** (971-0990), which is particularly active in aiding older Russophone Ann-Arborites and in helping new arrivals settle, and **St Vladimir's Church** (9900 Jackson Road, Dexter; tel. 475-4590, answering machine with directions and details of services in English and Russian; also <<http://www.stvladimiraami.org/>>). St

Vladimir's is a parish of the **Russian Orthodox Church Abroad**, one of the branches of Russian Orthodoxy in the West (see <http://www.directory.sjcp.org/> for other Detroit area parishes of this branch of the Russian Orthodox church). The priest at St Vladimir's, a Michigan alumnus, conducts services in a mixture of English and Old Church Slavonic. Divine liturgy is at 10 am every Sunday, and on major feast days, and is followed by coffee and snacks. The congregation is a mix of "second-wave" émigrés and their families, new arrivals from Russia, and Americans. Both Jewish Community Services and St Vladimir's are sources of information about local russophone events, as, of course, is the University's Center for Russian and East European Studies, at <http://www.umich.edu/~iinet/crees/>.

The **greater Detroit area** also continues to attract immigrants and long-term visitors from the former Soviet Union, many of whom settle initially in and around **Oak Park and Southfield**, before spreading out over the newer northern suburbs of Detroit (where Russian is heard increasing in many areas, and where pockets of Russian speakers increasingly assert their industry and prosperity by entering the area's booming real-estate market). This community is larger and more diverse than Ann Arbor's, and has its own commercial profile. During the 1990s, stores and other businesses, owned by recent immigrants and serving the local Russian-speaking community, were opened (and some closed) on the border of Southfield and Oak Park, north of Detroit. Although most of their customers are native Russophone, they all welcome and help English-speakers looking for Russian and similar items, or simply for the experience of "ethnic shopping".

All of these stores are useful sources of information about Detroit's Russian-speaking population. By reading the advertisements posted in them, you can find Russophone baby-sitters, doctors, car mechanics, lawyers, insurance and real-estate agents, and so on (sometimes even potential spouses!). And these stores will help you discover what local Russophone cultural events are planned (there are many plays, concerts, and so on, usually with touring performers from Russia). You will also see advertisements for Russian nights at restaurants, some weekly, some on special occasions. Another useful source of such information is provided by the local free Russian-language monthly newspapers, *Reklama Detroit* (tel. 248-569-4034) and *Detroitskie vesti*, which may be found in some of the stores below. If you want to buy recent newspapers and magazines, videos, CDs, cassettes, books, Russian pickles, Russian champagne, Russian cured fish, salami, caviar, or other "authentic" Russian products (some imported from Russia and Eastern Europe, some made by Russophone businesses in New York, New Jersey, and other centers of Russian-speaking population in North America), these shops are well worth a visit. And the caviar is a lot less expensive here than in Ann Arbor...

Always call ahead before you visit -- in the émigré community business hours and addresses change, and businesses themselves come and go quite quickly and unpredictably.

Entertainment and Restaurants

The **Millenium Theatre** in Southfield (115600 Hudson Drive; tel. 248-552-7000) is a common venue for Russian performances -- plays, singers, stand-up comedians, etc. Other area auditoria also host similar events. Most reflect the tastes of recent émigrés who emigrated as adults, so rock music is less common than *estradnaya muzyka*. Detroit-area russophone businesses usually advertise forthcoming performances by musicians and theatre groups.

Although not russophone in its performances, **Puppetart**, the Detroit Puppet Theatre (25 East Grand River, Detroit; tel. 313-961-7777; e-mail: puppetart@hotmail.com; <http://www.puppetart.org/>) is owned and mostly staffed by Russians. Located one block off Woodward in downtown Detroit, Puppetart stages highly professional performances in all the major genres of European puppet theatre. Russian works are common (for example, the Fall Season for 1999 included *Kolobok*, *Zhar-ptitsa*, and a Christmas show with Snegurochka and Ded Moroz). Performances are usually restricted to weekends.



The **White Star Nightclub** (9819 Conant, Hamtramck) has held regular “Russian Nights” on alternative Fridays for several years. These claim “the latest dance hits from Russia”, and announce themselves as the *kruteishaya “russkaya” tusovka v Detroite* (hottest “Russian” scene in Detroit). For information call 248-390-4041. The web site www.djlafemme.com also provides information about local discotheques and similar events. On RussianMichigan.com there are more details of local Russian discotheques, including some in Ann Arbor.

The most established “Russian” **restaurant** in the area is **The Fiddler**, 6676 Orchard Lake Road, West Bloomfield, MI 48322 (248-851-8782; Fiddlerdining@sprintmail.com; <http://www.michigansave.com/fiddler/>). This restaurant is on the north side of the West Bloomfield Plaza (which is located on the west side of Orchard Lake Road, just south of the intersection of Orchard Lake and Maple – from Ann Arbor, take 14 East to 275 North, to 696 East, to the Orchard Lake Road exit, and drive three miles north on Orchard Lake; turn into the Plaza and park on the side near-



est Maple, the restaurant is located in the middle of the strip). The Fiddler has received good reviews in the Detroit press, and seems to

do good business. It recently expanded. The restaurant serves a fairly predictable range of well-cooked Russian and Jewish dishes (the menu includes *pel'meni*, *vareniki*, *bliny*, Ukrainian *borshch*, stuffed cabbages and peppers, and other staples). It has good friendly service, and sometimes live music on weekends. It recently acquired a liquor license. The clientele includes local Russian-speakers and anglophones. In winter 2000/2001, its hours were: Sunday 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Tuesday-Thursday 11 a.m to 10 p.m; Saturday 10 a.m. to 10 p.m.



DINNER

SUNDAY 10 A.M. - 9 P.M.
TUESDAY - THURSDAY 11 A.M. - 9 P.M.
FRIDAY 11 A.M. - 10 P.M.
SATURDAY 10.00A.M. - 10 P.M.
RESERVATION RECOMMENDED

6676 ORCHARD LAKE RD.
WEST BLOOMFIELD, MI 48322
(248) 851-8782
FAX (248) 851-7685

GIFT CERTIFICATES AVAILABLE

Quite recently a major competitor for The Fiddler appeared: **Allegro**, 7295 Orchard Lake Rd, West Bloomfield, MI 48322 (248-737-5075), located very close to West Bloomfield's branch of New York International — see below. Allegro is open Wednesday and Thursday, 5 pm to 10 pm, Friday and Saturday 5 pm to 1 am, and Sunday 3 pm to 10 pm. Live music on Fridays and Saturdays, reservations recommended. The restaurant has received enthusiastic reviews.

[Oak Park/Southfield Businesses](#)

There are currently six major stores (two sell canned and dry foods, fish, meat, pickles, cakes, some newspapers, and other goods; there are also a bakery, a video rental outlet, a store selling audio and video tapes and a limited selection of books, and a furniture store) within a couple of blocks of **I 696 in Oak Park/Southfield**, which is home to many newly-arrived émigrés from the former Soviet Union. The choice of stores is modest by the standards of Brighton Beach, NY, and other larger Russophone communities, but most essentials of Russian life can be obtained here, as can much information about Russian-language events in the Detroit area. Oak Park/Southfield also has a



Russophone travel agency, while several other local businesses provide some Russophone services. Currently, this area's Russian-speaking community seems to be thriving, and most of these businesses show every sign of success.



Directions: from Ann Arbor take 14 to 275 North/96 West (signposted "Flint") and on to I 696 (Port Huron, etc). Take 696 east to exit 13 (for Oak Park), and take Greenfield Road north to **Euro Food International**, or south to **Gold International Bakery**, **New York International Foods**, **P. L. Video Club**, **Panorama**, and **The Twelve Chairs** (see below). During the rush hours, the summer construction season, and bad winter weather, this journey can be tiresome, but at other times it can be completed in about an hour.



Euro-food International, 15290 Lincoln, Oak Park, MI 48237. From I 696 take Greenfield north (ie, crossing over 696), and turn right onto Lincoln at the first light after 696.



Euro-food is on the left in a little strip mall just after the turn, next to a 7-11 store. It is the

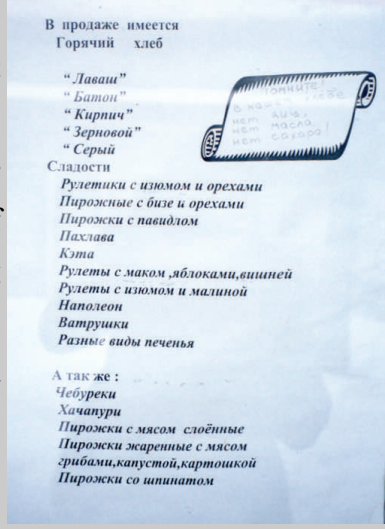


largest and longest-established of these stores, and doubled its floor space a couple of years ago. In addition to a wide range of groceries (from canned and dry good to pickles, meats, fish, and caviar), Euro-food sells newspapers, magazines, flowers, medications, greetings cards, and other essentials of Russian life. It now has a liquor license, and sells wines and beers from the former Soviet Union. Tel. 248-967-2146; hours Mon.-Sat. 10 am to 8 pm, Sun. 10 am to 6 pm. .

Gold International Bakery, Unit 10, 15600 West Ten Mile Road, Southfield, MI 48075. From I 696 take Greenfield south. Go through the first set of lights; the store is in a back courtyard of a



little mall next to the former Hiller’s Food Emporium, recently reopened as a One-Stop Food Market, on the right (west) side of Greenfield as you go south, *before 10 Mile Road*. The bakery is one of several businesses serving



the local russophone community in this small mall (see below). The owners are from Azerbaijan, and



bake bread and pastries traditional for the Caucasus as well as some Russian products. Their clay bread oven, lined on the outside with bricks, stands at the front of their store, and is often in use during business hours. It was built by masons brought specially for the task from the former Soviet Union.



Tel. 248-557-4988. Hours: Mon. 8 am to 8 pm, Tues. closed, Weds to Sat. 8 am to 8 pm, Sun. 8 am to 8 pm.

New York International, Unit 12, 15600 West Ten Mile Road, Southfield, MI 48075. From I 696 take Greenfield south. Go through the first set of lights; the store is in a back courtyard of a little mall next to the former Hiller’s Food Emporium, now the One-Stop Food Market, on the right (west) side of Greenfield as you go south, *before 10 Mile Road*. It is a couple of doors from Gold International Bakery (see above) and P. L. Video Club (see below). General groceries. Tel. 248-483-3830; hours Mon. to Sat. 9 am to 9 pm, Sun. 9 am to 6 pm. Another and larger branch of the same store has opened in West Bloomfield (see below).



P. L. Video Club, Unit 16, 15600 W. Ten Mile Rd, Southfield, MI 48076. From I 696 take Greenfield south. Go through the first set of lights; the store is in a back courtyard of a little mall next to the former Hiller's Food Emporium, now the One-Stop Food Market, on the right (west) side of Greenfield as you go south, *before 10 Mile Road*. It is a couple of doors from Gold International Bakery and New York International (see above). Tel. 248-557-8641; hours Mon. to Thurs. 12 noon to 9 pm, Fri. to Sun. 12 noon to 10 pm. This store has a good selection of Russian videos for rent, although the quality of picture and sound reproduction may occasionally leave something to be desired. It also provides video-conversion services for videos brought from abroad (Russia, of course, uses a different standard for VHS from that used in the U.S.; the videos for rental here are in the US system) and sells a small selection of books. It has a branch in the northwest suburbs (see below).



Twelve Chairs/Dvenadtsat' stul'ev, 25294 Greenfield Road, Oak Park, Mi 48237. Tel. 248-968-3663. From I 696 take Greenfield south. This store, named after a famous Il'f and Petrov novel, is in the first strip mall south of I 696, on the left (east) side of Greenfield as you go south from the freeway. The most visible of a number of russophone businesses selling furniture, cars and so on, it provides interesting insights into choices in interior design.

Farmington Hills/West Bloomfield

Farmington Hills and West Bloomfield (which are closer to Ann Arbor than Oak Park and Southfield) have two Russian food stores, a book and video store, and Russian Detroit's major restaurants (see above).

865-Deli opened in 1997 and has some good deli-style items, as well as a decent selection of frozen, canned, and dry goods. It has a liquor licence,

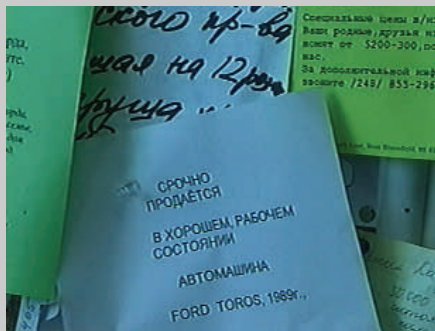


and also sells a small selection of newspapers. A second branch of New York International opened in West Bloomfield in 2000. These new businesses, further to the north-west, reflect the migration of younger and, probably, more prosperous Russophobes away from the Oak Park/Southfield area to the newer, outer suburbs, where many have bought houses.

865-Deli, 32407 Northwestern Highway (between Middlebelt and Fourteen-Mile Roads, north of I-696). Take the Northwestern Highway exit from I 696 and follow Northwestern Highway north – the store is on the west side of the road, ie on the left if you are driving north. It is in a rather more “up-market” strip mall than the Oak Park stores, near to a fast-food store and a Japanese restaurant. Like a number of these businesses, it also accepts telephone orders (248-865-3354). Mon. to Sat. 10 am to 9 pm; Sun. 10 am to 6 pm.

New York International, 7435 Orchard Lake Road, West Bloomfield, MI 48322. Tel. 248-538-6700. On Orchard Lake, where Northwestern Highway ends, in a shopping plaza at the north-east corner of the intersection of Orchard Lake and Northwestern Highway. Take the Orchard Lake exit from I-696. A larger branch of the Oak Park business. In early 2001 this store stocked several brands of Petersburg’s best-known range of beverages, the Baltika brand. Mon.-Sat. 10 am to 9 pm; Sun. 10 am to 6 pm.

Panorama, 7355 Orchard Lake Rd, West Bloomfield, MI 48322. Tel. (248)-538-0745. Another branch of the book and video store, located round the corner from New York International.



Press Coverage

In April 2003 the *Detroit Free Press* published an article on Russian food in the Detroit area (using material provided by the author of this document). As of 2005 the article was available at http://www.freep.com/features/food/russia15_20030415.htm.

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Small ads and a concert flyer from Russian-language stores in Oak Park and Southfield. Illustrations: photographs, Michael Makin, January, 2001; film stills, from *Russian Foodways*, by Alina Makin and Kathy Kemp, University of Michigan, 1998, available at the LRC, University of Michigan.

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