

My Story: Inna Kinney

Occupation: Founder and CEO, Economic and Community Development Institute (ECDI)

Home country: Soviet Union

Lives in: Bexley



I was born in Moscow. I loved my life as a child. It's a very culture-oriented society: theater, museums, operas. So I was brought up with all that. My father was an engineer, and my mother was an accountant.

In 1973, my mother was pregnant with my youngest sister. My father wanted us to be somewhere safer. Two weeks before we left, they said, "We're going to Israel." We sent our baggage, my piano—I still have my piano—rugs, everything. Our first stop was in Vienna. We got there, and my father was like, "Wait a second. Let's go to America, the land of opportunity."

We were the first Jewish family from the former Soviet Union to be resettled in Columbus. It was a Saturday in 1974 when we got here—I remember it like it was yesterday. We moved into this little apartment in the projects on the East Side. We went outside to go for a walk, and my parents were so upset because nobody's around. We came from a very cosmopolitan city—you walk outside, there's life.

It was very difficult to assimilate. We didn't know English. My father couldn't become an engineer in United States because you have to go back to school and be recertified. His first job here was cleaning toilets at a junkyard. He saved money and eventually opened the first Lev's Pawn Shop in Columbus and still owns the chain.

I've seen what it's like firsthand to have nothing and to build it for yourself. That's how ECDI was born. It all started with helping people from other countries and then morphed into providing services to anybody that wants to start or expand a business, buy a house, get an education. Hopefully in a couple of generations, people can say, "My parents were able to start a business because of ECDI."

I love Columbus. It's a city that has a lot of people coming and going, so it's very open to new cultures, and it's very diverse. I would never leave here.

—As told to Emily Thompson

VENTURE OUT: TRY ETHIOPIAN FOOD AT LALIBELA Prepare to eat with your hands—literally. Lalibela offers authentic Ethiopian cuisine, which means no utensils. Your only tool is injera, a spongy flatbread used for scooping (and for eating, of course). Vegetarians will enjoy shiro, a dish of simmered peas, tomatoes and onions, similar to Indian curry in consistency. While its flavor is initially subtle, shiro builds to a long, spicy finish. The marinated lamb and quanta fir fir (Ethiopian beef jerky) are also favorites. 1111 S. Hamilton Rd., Whitehall, 614-235-5355, lalibelarestaurant.net —Anthony Dominic