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Sweet Home Moscow

For Illinois native James Dwyer, a study program in 1989 turned into a 28-year love affair with Russia

By Alastair Gill

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Dwyer helped turn around the fortunes of dairy business Ehrmann Rus after taking the reins in 2012.
JAMES DWYER / PERSONAL ARCHIVE

Since first coming to Moscow in 1989 to study at the Plekhanov□Russian University of Economics, American□
***James Dwyer** has worked in the tobacco and spirits industries and is now CEO of the Russian division of Bavarian dairy□company Ehrmann, which manufactures and distributes yogurt□products all over Russia and the CIS.*

I was raised in a place called Jerseyville, Illinois. To this day□I still think it's the greatest place on the planet. It's an awkwardly□idyllic kind of place – 7,000 people, more cows and pigs□than people, but you know everybody. It's a place I love to go□back to because that's where my roots are.

In business, Russia is a place that abhors complexity. Complexity will kill you at any turn, and when you're in a fresh dairy business, it requires a military discipline in terms of your ability to execute. If you order too much milk, more than you're going to produce, you'd better be able to do something with it. And if you don't order enough, you have the same problem.

Sanctions have not really affected our business. Possibly the dessert category has been a little bit affected by this fragmentation of all sorts of products coming in from Europe. And that's given us a little bit of opportunity, but not to a significant degree.

When I first came to Russia in 1989 I felt like I came home. I love the culture, I love the people, I have a tremendous empathy and sense of belonging here. From a business standpoint, the people are so passionate and so involved, and I admire it so much that it really keeps me turning over. I really enjoy developing talented young Russian people into teams.

From the Belorussky Station over to Sokol is where I've always spent my time, even when I was a student in Moscow. This is my area, from Krasnaya Presnya to Sokol to Belorusskaya—it's kind of a Bermuda Triangle. We just love that area because there's very clean air and the park is wonderful. I just had a baby born in December and so we spend a great deal of time twice a day walking in the park with the baby.

I'm really inspired by this guy Arkady Novikov and what he's done in the restaurant business. I really like going to his restaurants.
Bolshoi restaurant is probably my
favorite place: We don't go there too frequently, but it's a place I really enjoy very much. We also enjoy his **Barashka**, we like Azerbaijani and Georgian food, so those places are great.

There's a place called U Pirosmany which is very close to my favorite place in Russia, Novodevichy Monastery. It was one of the first cooperatives opened back in the late 80s and I used to go there as a student and still enjoy going there today. Novodevichy Monastery is kind of a sacred place for me. It's beautiful and it's also very spiritual in a way.

I go cross-country skiing as much as possible. We really like going outside of Moscow and doing cross-country skiing. It's a great way to get some exercise, clear your head and think. The sauna's very important with old friends: We still go to the
Sanduny banya from
time to time. I've played golf since I was a kid but there's no time for golf anymore.

Once a year, almost religiously, we go to Yasnaya Polyana, which is the birthplace of Leo Tolstoy. There's a little hotel that's not too far from there, it's very good, very inexpensive, called
Grumant, and we really love to go there, either in the winter or the
summer. There's sports, and there's a great relaxation center facility there.

I have absolutely no intention to leave Russia. It's my home, and like many things in my life, it's rather paradoxical that I'm from Jerseyville, Illinois but I found my home in Russia. I'm still American at my core, but I'm of Russian spirit, as they say.

See below for details of the places mentioned in this interview.

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