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# Preserving a legacy

Julia Kole  
takes Arrow Park  
in a  
new direction

Julia Kole spent many happy summers with family members at Arrow Park as a child; now she is its general manager and trying to return it to its former glory.

Photography by Michael Bloom



Arrow Park in the mid-1960s. Photo courtesy the Tomczak family. Below left, a view of the staircase from the upstairs bedroom area. Below right, one of the busts of "The Four Immortals" just past the park's entrance.

By Deborah J. Botti

**A**row Park summers were a sensory swirl for Julia Kole, of second-generation Russian descent and now its general manager.

Squishy sand would tickle her toes as she splashed for hours in the cool lake waters. With the couple of dollars given to her for the day by her grandparents John and Anna Pappas, she'd quench her thirst and satisfy hunger pains at the concession stand before romping off again with her friends until the sun began to set.

"It was a close-knit community, and everyone knew what everyone was doing. All the kids were completely supervised by somebody," she says.

The days at the lake, however, were just the appetizer. The nights in the pavilion were the true feast, where hundreds of feet would pound the wooden floor, keeping time with the strains of a lively polka. Sometimes, the bright hues of folk costumes seemed to accent the energy of dancers' footwork. And the music – klezmer bands and Russian and Ukrainian folk vocalists and musicians – would bounce off the beams. Pete Seeger and Arlo Guthrie even had summer concerts there in the '60s.

"No, they weren't Russian or Ukrainian," says Kole. "But they were progressive for their time."

And "progressive" is the foundation upon which Arrow Park evolved.

**B**ack in the late '40s, along with speaking the same language and sharing a similar culture, there was another unifying thread for the Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian communities in Newark, N.J., and the boroughs of New York: a desire to find respite from sweltering city summers. So 600 families combined resources to purchase the 77 acres then known as AROW Farms.

"They were progressive union organizers from the inner cities," says Kole. "Arrow Park was initially AROW Farms Inc., Continental Organics, LLC, which stood for American Russian Organized Workers."

Kole says 14,000 people attended the opening party in 1948, which also drew cultural influences from around the world. From there, the park continued to grow, and members did all the work.

"The old ladies would teach the kids how to properly make stuffed cabbage. It had to be rolled in your hands. They'd yell if we didn't do it right because it was important to them to pass down the tradition," says Kole.

Along with the lodge, originally built in 1909 by Schuyler Schieffelin and his wife, Julia Cooper,





bungalows and gardens sprang up around the property. Many of the original founders, such as Kole's grandparents, bought land nearby so they could retire to Monroe and continue to volunteer at the park while enjoying its perks.

Schieffelin could be considered progressive in his own right. He and his wife were part of Tuxedo Park society. Schieffelin is listed in the Tuxedo Park Book, 1908, along with Bowen Bancroft Smith, the architect of the Schieffelins' home, and what is now the lodge at Arrow Park. And while he could have built in Tuxedo Park, it is alleged that because his friend Edward Henry Harriman was not allowed to, in solidarity he built his 15,000-square-foot summer home on 600 acres bought from Harriman.

The style of the home was progressive for its time and reflected the arts-and-crafts movement, which reacted to the Industrial Revolution. Fearing that skill and handiwork would be lost, that movement showcased fine workmanship, such as the stone exterior with 2-foot-thick concrete walls, hand-hammered ceilings, wide-plank floors and intricate, hand-designed tile work. The wood is harvested from the property.

By the '40s, however, the home was for sale –

just at the time members of Russian and Ukrainian clubs were looking to buy a place to get out of the city, says Alec Pappas, Kole's cousin.

After the founding families purchased the property, they incorporated and sold stocks.

"It's a family tradition," says Pappas. "There are 2,000 shares outstanding, and no one can have more than 10 shares."

And along with the shares of stock, the families have shared not only time at the 12-bedroom lodge but also the workload.

Kole, who grew up in Great Meadows, N.J., spent at least three weeks each summer with her grandparents.

"My grandfather was a chef, and my grandmother volunteered at Arrow Park," says Kole. "My grandfather was not interested in politics, so he was never on the board."

Still, politics touched that generation.

During the time of influence of Sen. Joseph McCarthy, AROW Park's name was changed to a more innocuous Arrow Park; many of the founders feared arrest.



Top, the lodge originally was built in 1909 by Schuyler Schieffelin and his wife, Julia Cooper. The style of the home was progressive for its time and reflected the arts-and-crafts movement. Above, Harry the Clown at Arrow Park in the mid-1960s. Photo courtesy the Tomczak family.



The band Gypsy Fun performs at Arrow Park. Right, glass-enclosed nooks allow peeks of beautiful outdoor views. Below, the main sitting area features hand-hammered ceilings and wide-plank floors.



The fear of the '50s was replaced by the counterculture of the '60s. And in 1971, an Arrow Park affirmation of sorts was completed, in the form of a garden that's home to the busts of "The Four Immortals." American poet Walt Whitman, Russian poet Alexander Pushkin, Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko and Belarusian poet Yanka Kupala stand today in solidarity just past the park's entrance.

"These men were committed to the fundamental brotherhood of mankind," says Kole. "They stood for freedom from oppression."

However, as with many of the cultures that melded to become America, the fervor of the immigrants – most of whom are now dead – faded.

"My parents' generation loved the culture, but they're truly American. My mother doesn't speak Russian, nor do my aunts and uncles," says Kole. "They came to the park, but they weren't as connected.

"And my generation is scattered. ... I grew up with that sense of community, but then moved to L.A."

Kole spent years in Hollywood as an agent, working with cinematographers such as Cornwall's Declan Quinn ("Leaving Las Vegas").

While Kole was building a life in California, Arrow Park suffered the effects of a dying first generation and disconnected second. Over the past 15 years, it struggled for survival while falling into disrepair.

"And I burned out in Hollywood. I wanted to do something different," she says.

So the telephone call from Kole's cousin, who was on the Arrow Park board, came at the perfect time. The 87-year-old manager retired last year; a replacement was desperately needed.

"I want to resurrect Arrow Park. I want to preserve the legacy of my grandparents," she says. "It won't be the same, but it will have the same spirit."

While there are still some details to be addressed, the main lodge house has been repaired and repainted. There are nine fireplaces but no televisions or clocks. The main guest rooms have private baths in period style, while the former servants' quarters share a toilet and bath area. Original artwork hangs in the common area.

"We've already started drawing worldwide guests

again," says Pappas. "This year, we had people come from France, Luxemburg and Singapore who came to shop at Woodbury Common."

"And a Ukrainian guy showed up from a Google search to fish in the lake," says Kole.

The lake shore also is home to a living pine-tree memorial to firefighters lost on 9/11. Paul and Joanne Dolan, who have connections with the Orange County Land Trust as well as charities that deal with bereavement, were instrumental in establishing it. And when Sunday morning beach yoga participants breathe deeply and reach to the sky, they do so near a healing totem, also erected after 9/11.

There once were formal gardens that Kole intends to have bloom again, along with a community garden that will supply an on-site restaurant. She wants the property to once again be known as an escape for city dwellers, but all people will be welcome to stay for the day or longer.

Concerts and cultural events will be planned for the May-November season, but, more importantly, Kole wants to re-create that strong sense of community that nurtured her as a child.

"I want to embrace the community of Monroe," she says. "They should be able to drop their kids off and know that they're safe."

For more information, visit [arrowparkny.com](http://arrowparkny.com).



Strolling the gardens of Arrow Park in the mid-1960s. Photo courtesy the Tomczak family. Below, Adirondack chairs provide a relaxing spot from which to enjoy the lake view.

