

CHAGRIN FALLS • BAINBRIDGE • BENTLEYVILLE

# NEIGHBORS

BUILDING COMMUNITY, ONE NEIGHBOR AT A TIME

MAY 2019

## ALEX GERTSBURG: FROM MOLDOVA TO THE AMERICAN DREAM



left to right,  
Jacob, Alex, Maya,  
Tiffany, Ethan

## ALEX GERTSBURG: FROM MOLDOVA TO THE AMERICAN DREAM

By Amy Sonia Richards, Content Coordinator | Pictures by Vincent Pearson Photography

**A**lex Gertsburg immigrated to the United States with his family at the age of four from Moldova, which he says “is consistently rated one of the most miserable countries on the planet.” His family was part of a giant wave of Soviet Jews that came to America in 1979.

“We followed a fairly traditional path of Soviet Jews,” Alex states. “We settled first in East Cleveland. Various charities gave us clothes, jobs, and English classes. My parents made some money and moved us to Cleveland Heights, South Euclid and then Lyndhurst.”

Being an immigrant wasn’t easy. “In the early years it was just a game to fit in,” Alex recalls. “We didn’t have much money, so our clothes were hand-me-downs and our parents had thick accents. I always felt like I stuck out like a sore thumb, but I figured out how to fit in after a while.”

While attending Brush High School, Alex was awarded an ROTC Army scholarship that payed for him to attend Miami University. Since Miami didn’t have its own ROTC Army program, he had to travel to Xavier University in Cincinnati every other day to train with its Army ROTC program. “I was on the road to Xavier by 5 am. I did that for four years.”

Upon graduation, he became a second lieutenant in the United States Army Reserve. From there, he went to officer basic course in Virginia. “It was like boot camp

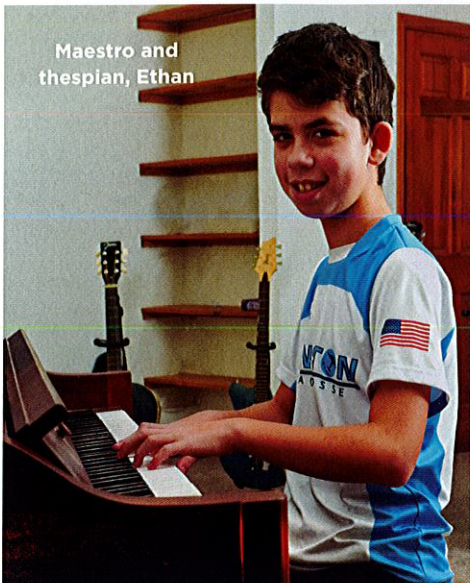
for officers, but focusing on strategy and tactics,” he remembers. After boot camp, he was assigned to the 762nd Transportation Company out of Tallmadge, Ohio.

While in the Reserves, he attended Cleveland Marshall School of Law. “I went to law school because when I was a kid I wanted to be Arnie Becker or Jimmy Smits from the then-popular tv show, *LA Law*. I thought they lived it up. Everything about their jobs seemed so amazing. I was about seven years old the first time I watched an episode of *LA Law*, and all I wanted to do was to become a lawyer after that,” he says.

While in law school and as a young lawyer, Alex drilled with the army unit as a second lieutenant. “When 9/11 happened, I was expecting to get called up. For the next two years, I was on pins and needles waiting. Every time I turned on the news, a new unit was being called up. It was unnerving. In January 2003, we got the call to go to Iraq.”

“When I got to Iraq, I knew I had a job to do. I was 28 years old. I felt an immense sense of responsibility because I had 160 soldiers depending on me to make the right call,” he recounts.

When he returned from Iraq, he returned to his job as a lawyer at Calfee, where he focused on securities litigation. In 2006, he was hired as in-house counsel for a midsize telecom company, Broadvox Communications,



Maestro and thespian, Ethan

located downtown. The company experienced exponential growth during the eight years he was there, almost tripling in size. "I went from being their sole lawyer to managing a law department of eight people," he says.

"I was auditing Broadvox and doing litigation, and I realized that I could do this as a service from my own firm," he recounts. Gertsburg Law Firm opened its doors in Chagrin Falls on November 3, 2016. Broadvox Communications was the firm's first client.

Gertsburg Law Firm is a full-service business law firm focusing 50% on business litigation, 35% on transactional law, 10% on estate planning and probate, and 5% on everything else. Alex is most proud of his CoverMySix Program, which he developed while at Broadvox Communications. "CoverMySix," he explains, "is an audit of the six areas most likely to affect a company's legal liability." He says, "Most lawyers are traditionally hired reactively, when a client is in trouble or is buying or selling something. CoverMySix helps business owners be more proactive by optimizing their documents and processes in six areas so they save money and avoid the headache of lawsuits." The firm has grown to 14 lawyers and staff and almost 1000 clients and has opened a second office downtown at 55 Erieview Plaza.

Besides his successful law firm, Alex has his oars in a lot of projects. One of these is Best.Podcast.Ever, which he records with Molly Gebler, Director of the Chagrin Valley

Chamber, from his firm's conference room every Monday. To date, they have recorded almost 80 episodes and get over 1,300 downloads a month. "We started recording conversations with local business owners and celebrities. It gets really funny and really deep," Alex says. "It's very creative. To get on the podcast, you either have to have broad impact or deep impact on other people or on the community as a whole. These are people who change people's lives." Their latest episode features Peter Balunek, of Peter's Wildlife Safaris, a conservationist who brings awareness of animals going extinct, helps build schools in Africa, and supports numerous charities through his safaris. "Our podcast has taken on a life of its own," says Alex.

Alex and Molly also sponsored the We Solve Problems essay contest for the last three years. "We gave away \$38,000 by persuading 200 local business owners to read essays and donate money. Students wrote about solving everyday problems, such as cyber bullying, texting and driving, or others that they picked on their own. The contest grew to 6,000 students."

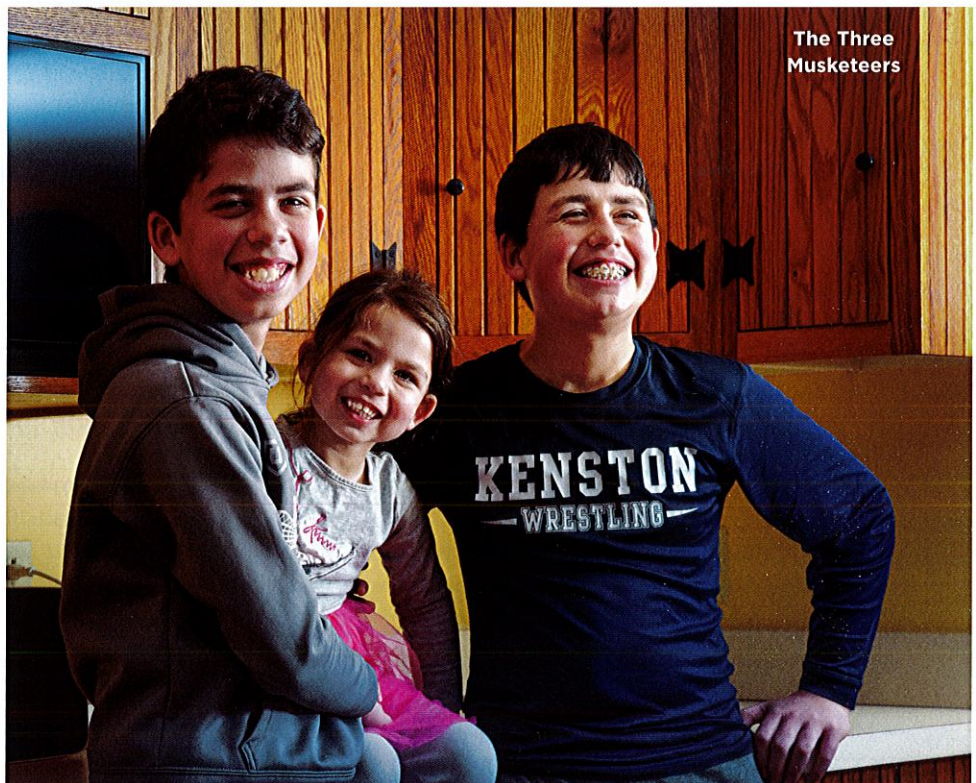
Besides spending time building his law firm and on his projects with Molly Gebler, Alex spends a lot of time with his girlfriend Tiffany Cobb and his three children, Jacob (14), Ethan (13), and Maya (5), who live with their mom in Auburn Township.

Tiffany grew up in Cuyahoga Falls and graduated from Kent State University. She worked for many years in clinical sales. She recently decided that she wanted to do something different, so she re-enrolled at Kent State University, this time as a graduate student, in order to become a dietician. Her goal is to have her own practice one day.

When the kids are with Alex and Tiffany, they do a lot of things around Cleveland. They visit the parks and museums on a regular basis. "We are always doing something fun," Tiffany says.

On their weekends without the kids, they love to go for long runs and listen to live music. They are also coffee shop aficionados. Tiffany explains, "We hit all of the coffee shops in cool neighborhoods. Alex writes (he is working on a book), and I study, and then we spend the rest of the day in that neighborhood and go to dinner there."

Alex and Tiffany also love to travel. They just spent a month in Argentina. "It was the best month ever," says Tiffany. They have a long list of interesting places they want to travel to when they have some time away from their busy schedules and responsibilities.



The Three Musketeers