

## Meet Svetlana Genesin, Programmer Extraordinaire and Susan L. Kupferman Circle of Excellence Awardee

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When Bridges and Tunnels officers working the Throgs Neck Bridge saw Svetlana Genesin, a cut-to-the-chase, puzzle-loving Ukrainian software programmer, dodging among the toll lanes in heavy traffic just before midnight one night, they didn't arrest her. In fact, they were glad that she had finally arrived.

Genesin, the manager of B&T's revenue systems operations, had just taken the highly effective wireless credit card payment system that her team created for the westbound toll plaza of the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge and cloned and implemented it for the tunnel booths at the Throgs Neck and Bronx-Whitestone bridges. When the field crew let MTA Headquarters know that something wasn't working, Genesin ran out of the office, rushed home, hopped into her car and drove out east to troubleshoot the problem.

"Svetlana is completely boots on the ground," Dyan Ganepola, director of B&T's Systems Development and Financial Applications department, told MTA Today.

Ganepola knows that he can always count on Genesin to have a plan and tell it like it is.

In 2012, Tim Baker, B&T's assistant vice president of strategic initiatives, had a problem that needed fixing: officers at toll plazas needed an easy way to accept credit cards when



Svetlana Genesin is one of eight recipients of the Susan L. Kupferman Circle of Excellence Award for 2016. (Photo credit: Patrick Cashin/MTA)

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drivers pulled up and had neither cash nor E-ZPass. He asked Genesin, who he calls the "guru of B&T's fiscal control and revenue system," if she could come up with a solution using off-the-shelf technology, make it super-secure, get it running within the year *and* still keep up with her normal revenue responsibilities. ^

Genesin will tell you that she enjoys solving puzzles with numbers (like the math and logic game KenKen), so it didn't surprise Baker or anyone else when she accepted the challenge.

And no one was surprised when Genesin tapped into the talents of her team, talked to the officers who would be using the system, paid close attention to all the details and pulled it off.

Genesin grew up in Odessa (Ukraine, not Texas, she frequently jokes) during the Soviet era, where her organizational skills and an emphasis on top performance resulted in a scholastic gold medal and a degree in electrical engineering. In 1990, she landed in New York City with her husband with a three-year-old daughter. She spoke no English.

"Being an immigrant trying to raise a family teaches you survival skills," she said, recounting the series of minimum wage and entry-level jobs she held until she learned enough English to start teaching word processing and other computer applications in an adult education program, as well as enough basic coding to move into programming. She was assigned to an MTA systems project while working as a programmer for a consulting firm, and a few years later, the MTA offered her a position.

At the time, no one anticipated the amount of drive, determination, spirit and level of understanding they would witness. Even when her husband became ill and died in 2002, Genesin, who has since remarried, continued to stay on top of her project management responsibilities, explaining, "I became the one with the responsibility to pay bills, plan things for the kids, and manage it all."

Besides, she reflects, "I do my best work when I'm under stress." v

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Besides, she reflects, "I do my best work when I'm under stress."

Always being organized and making lists and plans have helped her, both in her personal life and at work, Genesin said. But Baker feels that his colleague's success is due to far more than her attention to detail.

"Some programmers can do a good job of coding. Others have a good understanding of business processes, but Svetlana also makes sure that everything works from a people perspective," he said.

The evidence is the warm welcome she always receives at the facilities, the respect with which she listens to people's ideas and her puckish sense of humor that encourages a sense of camaraderie and makes it fun to work on her team.

For someone who has met so many personal and professional challenges with such success, it's surprising to hear Genesin say that one of her toughest hurdles has been to interpret a user's requirements for a system.

"Some people need you to explain in words what the system is going to do; others tell you they need to see it first. So, you have to use different methods to try to understand what different people want. It's not always easy."

But after 18 years at the MTA, she says wryly, "I know exactly how everyone will behave."

And that ability to make technology work, keep revenue humming and help officers and commuters to stay safe at busy crossings? *That's* the secret to her success.

*MTA Today will introduce you to other 2016 Kupferman Award winners in profiles that will appear over the next several weeks. If they remind you of one of your own colleagues, you can find nomination forms under Departments -- Human Resources.* ^

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