

# Michael Smolyansky, entrepreneur

*Russian immigrant founded health-food company in 1986*

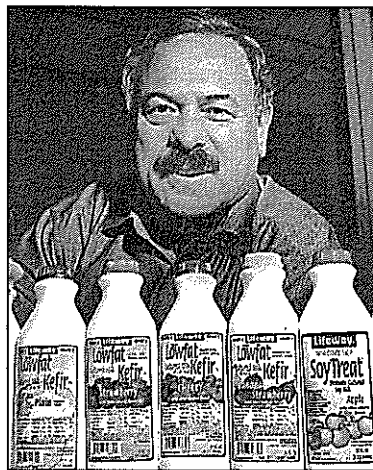
By SANDRA GUY  
BUSINESS REPORTER

Michael Smolyansky came to America from Russia 26 years ago with \$176 in his pocket.

While on a business trip to Germany, Mr. Smolyansky and his wife, Ludmila, searched for kefir, a yogurtlike dairy drink considered a dietary staple in Russia.

They snapped up two quarts of kefir in a supermarket. Reminded of their fondness for the product, Ludmila urged her husband, an engineer by training, to make his own kefir when they returned to America.

Mr. Smolyansky took up the challenge and started Lifeway



**Michael Smolyansky**  
Took firm public in 1988

Foods Inc. in 1986.

Two years later, he was expanding the original manufacturing plant to keep up with demand

from health-conscious consumers. He took the company public on the Nasdaq in 1988.

Mr. Smolyansky, a Morton Grove resident who served as president and CEO of Lifeway Foods, died Sunday of a heart attack. He was 55.

"He had never had a sick day. He lived for this company. He thrived on it," said Mr. Smolyansky's daughter, Julie, who on Tuesday was named to succeed her father as company president and CEO.

Lifeway Foods employs 55 and reported 2001 revenues of \$10.7 million. The company recently announced it would replace Arthur Andersen LLP as sponsor of Chicago's Bastille Day 5K Run/Walk and Block Party.

Thomas Kunz, president and CEO of Dannon Co. and a member of the Lifeway board, called Mr. Smolyansky "an innovative entre-

preneur and leader in the specialty health food segment" who anticipated consumer interest in so-called functional food.

Kefir is an example of a probiotic food, so named because it replenishes the "good" bacteria in people's intestines, making it easier to digest food and counteract the harmful effects of antibiotics.

Mr. Smolyansky received an engineering degree from the Kiev Polytechnical Institute and worked at E.J. Littell Machine Co. in Chicago before he founded Lifeway Foods.

In addition to his wife and daughter, he is survived by his mother, Olga Smolyansky; his son, Edward Paul, and his son-in-law, Yuri Pinsker.

Funeral services will be at 11 a.m. today at Weinstein Family Services Wilmette Chapel, 111 Skokie Blvd., Wilmette. Burial will follow at Memorial Park in Skokie.