

New arrival 26 yrs. ago dynamo now

WHEN MARINA KOVALYOV immigrated to New York from St. Petersburg, Russians were a new presence tugging at the pant leg of the city's Jewish community with no distinct pull of their own.

That was 26 years ago. Last week, Mayor Bloomberg, whose own grandparents hail from Belarus, took the time to honor the leaders of the city's immigrant communities.

Kovalyov was there for the festivities at Gracie Mansion on Monday. Not as an onlooker, as she once had been, but as an honoree.

"This is a big day for me," beamed Kovalyov, clutching the hard-earned certificate of appreciation she had received from the mayor moments earlier.

"The fact that I was noticed like this it shows that I succeeded and that my wonderful community has jumped from one part of the world to here, successfully."

Gene Borsh, director of the Local Russian Emigration Organizations, couldn't agree more. "This is no longer the time of fake smiles and token Russian words. It's a sign of respect to the Russian community," he said.

"We have great potential. Last year alone, we registered 5,000 new voters and gave out 15,000 forms. Politicians are seeking our support and we're giving it to those who do it for our community."

Kovalyov, who heads the Russian American Arts Foundation, was among four city community leaders honored by Bloomberg, who is up for reelection in November, during Immigrant

BY VERONIKA BELENKAYA
DAILY NEWS WRITER

History week.

"Over 40% of the people who live in the city were born outside of the U.S.," said Bloomberg as he opened the award ceremony. "It's a constant influx of different cultures."

"[Kovalyov] makes a big difference in the community," Bloomberg told the Daily News. "She also has a personality."

That spunky, go-getter personality is what earned Kovalyov a place as one of the go-to names known to help integrate Russian and American cultures and commercial products into the respective communities.

"Ms. Kovalyov is highly regarded as a business and cultural leader in the Russian community," said award presenter and New York 1 reporter Shazia Khan. "She has successfully introduced new companies to the Russian market, such as Target and the Daily News."

But it was not a bump-free road for the small-framed, short-haired Kovalyov, who is easy to spot with a nearly life-size pin of an American flag and large blue framed glasses.

"I came here not speaking English. I remember my husband and I would stand by the subway with one token deciding who would go looking for work that day because we couldn't afford two tokens," she recalled.

vbelenkaya@nydailynews.com



Mayor Bloomberg congratulates Russian immigrant Marina Kovalyov after she received a certificate of appreciation. Kovalyov heads the Russian American Arts Foundation.

BRYAN SMITH

PM delays Moscow trip

KIEV — Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko postponed a visit to Moscow planned for this weekend after Russian prosecutors refused to drop a criminal case against her.

Economics Minister Serhiy Terokhin said the prime minister did not fear arrest — she would have diplomatic immunity — but was canceling the trip as a matter of principle. She is accused of bribing Russian defense officials when she was head of Ukraine's main gas distributor. Russian prosecutors have issued an international warrant for her arrest.

New Pope mend ties?

ROME — The head of the Russian

Orthodox Church, Patriarch Alexiy II, said in an interview published last week that he hoped the next Pope would have the "necessary tact" to improve strained relations between the two churches.

The Orthodox Church prevented Pope John Paul II from fulfilling a long-held dream of visiting Russia because it was worried Rome was trying to poach Orthodox followers.

The Russian church sent a delegation to the Pope's funeral, but Alexiy did not attend.

Rummy offers support

BISHKEK, Kyrgyzstan — U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld

expressed support for Kyrgyzstan's new leaders last week and won fresh promises that a U.S. air base could stay.

It was the first visit by a senior Western official to the impoverished Central Asian former Soviet Republic since a coup last month ousted President Askar Akayev after 15 years of rule. Rumsfeld also visited Iraq and Afghanistan

on his trip.

"The United States is wishing them well in the important work that they are engaged in, in building a stable and modern, prosperous democracy," Rumsfeld told a news conference last week after talks with acting President Kumanbek Bakiyev.

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