

Forum aims to quell tensions

Scholar plans to talk about Bukharian history at Forest Hills Y

BY ANNA GUSTAFSON

Forest Hills and Rego Park are home to one of the largest populations of Bukharian Jews in the world, but not many of their neighbors know much about the religious group that hails mainly from Central Asia — something Forest Hills resident Sergey Kadinsky said he hopes to change.

Kadinsky will speak about the history and culture of the Bukharian Jewish community at the Central Queens YM & YWHA in Forest Hills at 1:30 p.m. June 29.

"I've noticed many don't know much about Bukharians besides the fact they have big fences and houses," said Kadinsky, 25. "I want them to see the culture that resides in these homes."

Tensions have surfaced between Bukharians and non-Bukharians in recent years, predominantly because Forest Hills residents have said they were resentful that some Bukharians would tear down smaller homes in the neighborhood and build larger ones.

In response to complaints about over-development in the Cord Meyer area of Forest Hills, the City Council passed a rezoning plan last year that limits a house's height.

"By learning about their history and culture, you'll appreciate their



A traditional Bukharian teacher instructs students.

Photo courtesy of Central Queens YM & YWHA

ideas," Kadinsky said. "For example, why do they like to build large homes? Because they like to have grandparents and grandchildren in the same home."

Kadinsky, a Latvian native, is not Bukharian but has spent years researching Bukharian culture after Robert Pinkhasov, a retired urologist from Rego Park, asked Kadinsky, who speaks fluent Russian, to help translate a book he was writing about Bukharians.

Bukharian Jews, who primarily come from Central Asia, faced economic decline and civil unrest following the breakup of the former Soviet Union. Many of the world's 250,000 Bukharian Jews left Central

Asia for places like Israel and the United States, with some 50,000 now living in Forest Hills and Rego Park, according to the United Jewish Appeal Federation of New York.

Pinkhasov's book, "Bukharian Jews: An Encyclopaedic Reference," was published by the author and may be used in a recently launched Queens College course on Bukharian Jews taught by Rego Park resident Imanuel Rybakov.

The Bukharian community has become increasingly involved in area politics, and Kew Gardens resident Albert Cohen was the first Bukharian Jew

to run for citywide office last year. Cohen, originally from Tajikistan who became known to some as the "Bukharian Barack Obama," ultimately lost the Democratic primary for the 29th Council District to present Councilwoman Karen Koslowitz (D-Forest Hills), but many Bukharians saw it as an important first political step for their community.

The Central Queens Y is at 67-09 108 St. in Forest Hills. The June 29 event is open to the public and a \$5 donation is suggested. For more information, call 718-268-5011, Ext. 151 or visit cqyjcc.org.