

The Independent University of Moscow in Its New Quarters

A. B. Sossinsky



New home of the Moscow Center for Continuous Mathematical Education and the Independent University of Moscow.

A very uncharacteristic event for Russia of the mid-'90s occurred on September 25, 1996. In an impressive opening ceremony, the city of Moscow granted a 49-year lease of a building, located in the city's historic center, recently repaired, beautifully redecorated, and equipped at its own expense, to a small unpublicized independent educational organization called MCCME. This abbreviation stands for the Moscow Center for Continuous Mathematical Education, a nonprofit organization created only two years ago at the initiative of N. N. Konstantinov and the Independent University of Moscow. The president of

A. B. Sossinsky is senior researcher at the Institute for Problems in Mechanics of the Russian Academy of Sciences and lecturer at the Independent University of Moscow. His e-mail address is abs@ecfor.msk.su.

its Board of Trustees is Vladimir Arnol'd, and its main activities are related to mathematical contests, advanced math curricula for high schools, and teacher training. The MCCME also serves as the organizational backbone of the Independent University of Moscow (IUM), and the new building is where the Higher Mathematics College of the IUM now holds its classes.

How could this possibly happen today in Russia, with the economy in shambles, with state support for fundamental research practically nonexistent? These questions were on the lips of numerous mathematicians present at the dedication. There was a large turnout—it seems the entire Moscow mathematical beau monde was there: the independent research mathematicians constituting the teaching staff of the IUM; the young, self-denying math educators engaged in the activities of the MCCME; as well as top establishment mathematicians formerly of the Soviet scientific *nomenclatura*, including the president of the Russian Academy of Science, Yuri Osipov, and the rector of Moscow State University, Victor Sadovnichii.

At the building's main entrance the traditional ribbon cutting was performed by V. I. Arnol'd and Alexandr Ilyich Muzikantski, prefect of the Central District of Moscow, the latter replacing Mayor Yuri Luzhkov in absentia. Then the guests moved on to the conference hall, where the dedication ceremony was held. Again, uncharacteristically, the speeches were brief, informal, and lively, with Arnol'd drawing laughs from the audience in his comments on the cost efficiency of supporting mathematics as com-



Vladimir Arnol'd speaking at the dedication in the conference hall of the new facility.



A. B. Sossinsky reading the letter from AMS president Cathleen Morawetz to Arnol'd.

pared to physics: mathematicians produce as much, he said (meaning published papers), as physicists do, but at one fiftieth of the price. V. Sadovnichii gave a speech very supportive of the IUM, dispelling rumors about alleged conflicts between Moscow State University and the IUM. Other speakers included A. I. Muzikanski, Yuli Ilyashenko (the dean of the IUM math college), P. Arnoux (the French cultural attaché), and Yu. Osipov. A congratulatory message from AMS president Cathleen Morawetz was read. The official part was concluded with the award of a dozen Mayor's honor stipends to Math Olympiad winners and meritorious IUM undergraduates. Then the guests dispersed to visit exhibits of MCCME and IUM activities and for coffee and

champagne. All this took place in a very festive atmosphere, hope and optimism mingling with nostalgia and disbelief as mathematicians of all ages and views discussed the prospects of the IUM and Moscow mathematics in general.

Of course this "minor miracle", as some of the speakers at the dedication ceremony described it, was not due to pure chance. It was masterminded by N. Konstantinov, Yu. Ilyashenko, A. Shen, and I. Yashchenko (the executive director of MCCME) and would not have occurred without the benevolent support of A. I. Muzikanski, an enlightened politician, formerly a math major at Moscow University.

So now the IUM Higher Mathematics College continues to function in its splendid new locale. On the bright side, efforts of numerous enthusiasts of informal math teaching and contests grouped around the MCCME continue supplying the IUM with well-prepared and motivated freshmen students. The present crop of graduate students is absolutely first rate. But many of the problems remain. The main ones are the absence of regular sources of income and the IUM's inability to ensure draft exemption for the students. Concerning the former, the IUM is not state supported and charges no tuition (in fact, it pays all students some scholarship money, tiny amounts by Western standards, but still...), and so balancing its (albeit very small) budget remains a difficult exercise. As to the draft, recent changes in legislation have ruined all hopes of organizing the Russian equivalent of the ROTC program in the framework of another university, which means that male IUM students must matriculate at another (state-sponsored) institution to avoid the draft (and thus carry a double workload). This will change by the year 2000, provided Yeltsin makes good on his promise to do away with the draft altogether.

And provided the IUM will last that much longer. Will it? One of the most assiduous IUM lecturers answered this question by saying, "I'm an optimist. I would say it's a toss-up."