



Clockwise from left, John Kozlovsky and Eugene Plishevsky finish the top of dome at St. Vladimir Memorial Church; small square of gold leaf is added and leaf is held and rolled into place by the two men.



## RUSSIAN GOLD

### Church dome glistens with 23 karat glow

**E**ighty-five feet above the streets of Jackson Township, near where heaven must meet the earth, Eugene Plishevsky and John Kozlovsky are reroofing the dome of St. Vladimir Memorial Church.

But this is no ordinary roofing job. No asphalt shingles, no roofing rolls and not a drop of tar is being used here. This roof is literally made of gold.

Using an ancient process to glue sheets of 23 karat gold leaf, 4 millionths of an inch thick, to the fiberglass dome of the cathedral, the two men have spent the last six weeks gilding the exterior surfaces.

Though the process itself is not complicated, the sheer magnitude of the task made it difficult to find anyone willing to do the job.

The Boston contractor the church first planned to use realized later that more was involved than originally thought, Plishevsky said.

The revised estimate for the labor was more than the church could afford, so the church sought the help of its members.

"Everyone else was afraid of the height, so I agreed to put up the scaffolding and to refiber-glass the roof, which was cracking in several places," said Plishevsky, a retired tool and die maker.

The Rev. Steven Sabelnik, a priest from a Russian Orthodox Church in Trenton and a master builder who had done work on the church before, was to do the actual gilding. But when the time came for the gilding, Sabelnik was busy working on the interior, so Plishevsky and Kozlovsky took on that job as well.

Last summer, with the advice of Oleg Rodzianko, who had worked on the design and construction of the dome in 1962, Plishevsky erected the scaffolding around the church.

See CHURCH, page D15



Kozlovsky (left) Plishevsky at base of dome and on scaffolding they erected around dome.

Asbury Park Press photos/text  
By Robert Bielk



# Church

From page D9

This was perhaps the most difficult and demanding part of the job; a failure here could damage the church severely or could even cost the two men their lives. It took two weeks to complete the scaffolding.

They then put new fiberglass on the exposed surfaces of the dome, which took two months to complete.

Late last year the church purchased \$14,000 worth of gold leaf, but the gilding had to wait until the following spring for better weather.

Neither Plishevsky nor Kozlovsky had any experience with gold leaf, but

both were willing to learn. With tutoring from Sabelnik, they learned the gilding process quickly.

In May, the two began the gilding process. Using a small tool to unroll the delicate 3-inch wide gold leaf and a special glue called Gold Size, they covered the dome in small sections working down from the tip.

They worked under a tent to keep the delicate pieces of gold from blowing away. After carefully laying the strips and smoothing them with their hands, they touched up any spots where the gold had not adhered using small squares of gold.

When an entire area had been completed, they smoothed the leaf with a tuft of cotton, carefully working out any wrinkles or overlap in the gold.

The finished effect is one of a

painted surface, but the gold has a durability and beauty far exceeding any paint.

The two have worked 12 hours daily, weather permitting. Their goal is to finish in time for the church's millennium celebration this month.

The Russian Orthodox Church will celebrate the 1,000th anniversary of the Christianization of Russia on July 31. In the year 988, Prince Vladimir of Russia had his pagan subjects baptized into the Greek Orthodox religion, which later became the Russian Orthodox Church.

St. Vladimir's in Jackson Township has been a reflection of the dedication of the Russian Orthodox community to its church. Since its beginnings in 1938, the structure has assumed a proportion that rarely fails to inspire awe in people who pass it. And it is largely through the efforts of church members, such as Plishevsky and Kozlovsky, that it has happened.