

Multicultural mission comes to an end

When Ewa Fenn first settled in Tauranga 25 years ago she was part of the city's small migrant community, blending in until the native Pole started talking.

By Hamish Carter

"As soon as I spoke people wanted to know where I was from," says Ewa, who is stepping down from her seven-year role as Tauranga Regional Multicultural Council president following a final event next week..



After seven years leading the Tauranga Regional Multicultural Council, Ewa Fenn has passed the reins to new president Barry Reid. Photo by Tracy Hardy.

While thinking Kiwis were judging her when they asked her nationality, Ewa later realised it was just curiosity.

And with tolerance and acceptance critical to her – she believes the increasing visibility of migrants in the Western Bay of Plenty community has led to less prejudice.

"Because there are so many migrants and they are in shops and they are doctors and policemen and so on, it's just normal," says Ewa, who is excited about the region's increasingly multicultural community.

"I've seen a huge change in the number of people settling here – we've got 100 ethnic groups involved now."

Ewa has been a big part of this change through the TRMC's work, including fostering monthly Living in Harmony events where nationalities share their culture with the public.

"It's always good to hear people's stories and see their pictures. It brings the culture to life," says Ewa, who

recalls being surprised by the Bangladeshi culture at an event.

"They had pictures of beautiful cities and beautiful scenery – it wasn't what I expected."

Since getting involved in TRMC about 10 years ago, Ewa has been a major driving force behind its growth.

Highlights include helping make the region more accommodating to migrants by establishing the Bay of Plenty Interpreting Service – now offering translators in 20 languages – and pushing for changes in government services to help new settlers.

"It's been a busy few years, but it's been very satisfying," says Ewa, who is turning her focus to family and supporting the Polish Community Trust and its children's language school.

Ewa will be replaced by incoming president Barry Reid.

The multicultural council's growth will be celebrated on Wednesday, when its 20th anniversary is marked with a function. For details, call 07 571 6419.