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Media's harsh glare

Mayor-elect's gal pal kisses quiet life goodbye



Taylor in '77 Dartmouth yearbook.

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Three weeks ago, Diana Taylor faced her baptism by fire as a New York City public figure.

Taylor, Mayor-elect Michael Bloomberg's girlfriend, walked into The Pierre to attend a charity luncheon and found herself engulfed in a sea of TV cameras and strobes, all trained on her.

A reserved, accomplished woman who has built a 20-year career as a financial specialist on Wall Street and as an aide to Gov. Pataki, Taylor looked startled and uncomfortable.

A veteran paparazzo gave her a stark piece of unsolicited advice: "You'd better get used to this, honey."

The counsel she got from a longtime state political pal? "Next time, use the back door. She was completely taken aback, very uncomfortable."

As Bloomberg's girlfriend of a little more than a year, Taylor, 46, of the upper East Side, finds herself the center of attention in a world that is not her own.

"He is showing her a lot of new things," said a longtime friend. "Right now, she is trying to do a lot of the stuff he does."

Last weekend, the couple jetted off to Bloomberg's Bermuda home. She has been on his arm at numerous black-tie dinners and parties.

A skier, tennis player and runner, Taylor also is learning Bloomberg's game: golf.

But she is so unaccustomed to Bloomberg's world that she has had to borrow long dresses from friends to attend the whirlwind of evening events with her beau.

Taylor's style is reflective of her: simple, understated clothing with little make-



RICHARD CORKERY DAILY NEWS

ON THE TOWN Michael Bloomberg and Diana Taylor attending Breast Cancer Research Foundation's annual spring gala and concert in May. His subsequent election has propelled Taylor into the city's circle of celebrities.

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up — a far cry from the flamboyance of Bloomberg's former female friends, such as singer Diana Ross.

"I'd like to think he finds her a breath of fresh air," said a Taylor friend. "She's easy to be with, nonjudgmental and not out to advance her own career."

In her straightforward way, Taylor initially agreed to be interviewed by the Daily News. A few days later, however, she called back to say the interview was off. "Mike's people don't think it's a good idea," she said.

Private life's private

Bloomberg has since insisted he will not discuss his private life.

For Taylor, the sudden and intense interest in all things about her — from her clothing, to her height (at nearly 5-feet-10, she towers over Bloomberg), to her future with him — has been tough to take.

"To have a 20-year career boiled down to her coat and hair, that was hard," said a friend, referring to a newspaper story that compared her look with that of Judith Nathan, Mayor Giuliani's girlfriend. "I don't think that she should have been surprised, but she is surprised."

Although her friends shy away from any comparisons with Nathan, they say it's unlikely Taylor will eagerly pose for the cameras.

"She will handle this with dignity and with a reserved manner that will be appropriate," said a friend. "It helps enormously she has her own career and own life."

Richard Kessel, Taylor's boss at the Long Island Power Authority, where she has been chief financial officer since February and earns $206,000 a year, said he didn't even know she was dating Bloomberg "until I read it in the papers."

"She is reserved and shy, quiet, understated and to the point," Kessel said. "At board meetings, I have to tell her to speak up. Diana likes to be judged by her work product. She is spectacular at her job, a true professional."

Her office is "very sparse," he said. "Diana is not at all a fussy person."

Every few weeks, Kessel and Taylor have breakfast together at a Merrick, L.I., diner where Taylor orders just a bagel and coffee. "It's not a fancy place, but it's great food and she loves it," he said.

Before her post at the energy company, Taylor worked in the Pataki administration and helped put together the $7 billion deal that created LIPA. She has worked at several investment banks and helped found M.R. Beal & Co., an investment firm owned by members of minority groups and women.

The oldest of three children, Taylor grew up in Greenwich, Conn., where she attended Greenwich Country Day School. President Bush and financier Ted Forstmann are also alumni of the school.

She went to boarding school near Boston for a year before returning home to finish up at Greenwich High School. She then went off to Dartmouth.

Taylor's father, Edwin Taylor, worked in the purchasing department of Union Carbide. Her mother, Lois Taylor, was a schoolteacher.

Her longtime friends from Dartmouth — where she was one of 500 women in a student body of 3,500 and graduated with an economics degree — paint a night out with Taylor this way: "We have two martinis, and it's time to go home. This is not 'Sex and the City.' "

She and Bloomberg met last fall at a business lunch where he was the keynote speaker and she sat beside him.

Taylor, who is divorced and has no children, is reserved even in how she describes her relationship with Bloomberg, telling friends "she has great admiration for the mayor-elect," said state Parks Commissioner Bernadette Castro.

"What's important is how happy she sounds when she talks about him," Castro said. "She told me, 'He is such a wonderful person.' "

Playing down party image

The portrayal of Bloomberg as a social butterfly who is out on the town every night "is not the person he projects to her," a friend said. "He likes people, but she doesn't think he's over the top."

Kessel has counseled Taylor that life in the public eye is like riding a roller coaster.

"There are going to be good days and bad days," he said he told her.

So far, Taylor has had both. Bloomberg's Election Night win was good, and Taylor stood behind him, bouncing up and down with glee. Stories about her hair and clothes are not so good.

As for her future with Bloomberg, Taylor will tell her friends only that on those good days, "I'm having fun. For now, that's plenty."

With Heidi Evans

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