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The world’s northernmost alternative newspaper

Vol. 11, Issue 5  March 19, 2019  www.icepeople.net

- Trash warrior treasured
- Random weirdness in hell
- Actually, this pic represents the entire issue  Pages 2-5

Partly cloudy with snow and strong winds at times, and temperatures of -5C to -15C.

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Lots of anniversary crap

Sarah Auffret killed in 737 Max crash

Trym Aunevik goes golden at World Games

Relive a decade of agony. Or don’t

Pages 18-29

Sarah Auffret killed in 737 Max crash

Trym Aunevik goes golden at World Games

Relive a decade of agony. Or don’t
Who's to blame and how to express your wrath

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Corrections policy

When we screw up you'll know about it – on the front page. One of the big complaints about newspapers is they tend to bury corrections and clarifications deep inside where few people who read the original article see them. If we need to fix something, an alert box on the front page will state what story is in error and where the full correction is printed.

Submitting material

Letters, columns, photos and other material are welcome, but we can't offer pay for published items since nobody here is getting paid at the moment. Submissions in electronic form (text, Word documents, JPEGs, etc.) are highly preferred, although typing and/or scanning of items will be considered on a per-case basis. We reserve the right to edit submissions for length, clarity, accuracy, libel
Barely bloodsucker bait: Sorry, but this fearless fossil is a bit fishy compared to some other vampires of Svalbard (whose stories are told in headlines such as “Vampire therapy” could reverse ageing,” “Gene turns mosquito into vampire” and “Jeff Allen Vs. the Time Suck Vampire.”

To ensure great tales about tails is the first newspaper in Europe to be accepted as a full member of the Association of Alternative Newsmedia. That means a whole new global audience will be looking to Svalbard – and what it might have to offer those who visit. Tell them what you have with our extremely affordable print and

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JØRGEN BERGE

WEIRDNESS, from page 2

he's undercover so he's not going to resemble the pictures from all that Bondesque media coverage of his capers (and presumably he won't stick out like a Martian). But we do have some possible dirt on his local contact, as Verdens Gang reported it “has been in touch with Jason Roberts, who runs the company Polar X [because, of course it's named that –Ed] and has worked for many years with facilitating film and TV productions in Svalbard. He does not want to comment on the matter.” Last we were in touch with Jason he was helping out cops on the case of local crazed murderers infected with some supervirus unleashed by climate change so, while pretty much everyone involved in that died and last we heard an infected body was on its way to the mainland, at least there's a chance the latest hostile threat is in experienced hands…

Speaking of severe Svalbard viruses plaguing the outside world, (for anyone not comprised of our two regular readers, we noted just last week those first two words are an absurdly common transition in these rants), it turns out some Mediterranean fisherman are having “major problems with a subwater scavenger” known as – wait for it – vampire lice. But while those vital force feeders are newly haunting the fisherfolks of the Aegan Sea, a UNIS professor told The Official Local Paper of Bloodsuckers the creatures are quite common in Svalbard. Unlike their Transylvanian cousins, the shapeshifters of the seas strike at all hours regardless of the full moon and fishermen are reporting their catch being scavenged within three to four hours of being caught in the nets. That “other” paper noted vampire lice are carrion eaters between 0.5 and three centimeters in size, and “they enter their victim

See WEIRDNESS, page 4

See WEIRDNESS, page 4
WEIRDNESS, from page 3

through the mouth, the gills or the eyes and they are very efficient…”

Speaking of parasites, the opening sentence of this article says it all without any wanna-be witiness from us: “An Ohio zoo has become the repository for the world’s largest collection of polar bear poop as researchers work to create a pregnancy test to aid the survival of this threatened species.” But wait, there’s more: “Some poop mailed to (the researchers) can be downright flashy. Zoos with multiple females sprinkle glitter and dye on the samples to help identify whose poop is whose.” Somewhat more straightforward, scientist Erin Curry says researchers are comparing compounds in fecal matter from females that are pregnant with those that aren’t in the hope of finding specific compounds that will help develop a pregnancy test. With all the various "vaults" out there getting mentions following the fame our very own (and very leaky) Doomsday Vault – including the recently opened data vault next door and one for mouse sperm in outer space – we’re just glad we’re not taking any more crap here than we already get. Not that the homeland of the poop preserve is short on all types of scat, including the comments section of the article where Best of the Public proclamations are spouting such wisdom as “in the wild polar bears are doing what nature designed animals to do. They are finding a way to pass on their genes. They are mateing with brown bears and having cubs that can survive in warmer climates…”

More seed vault-related weirdness: for whatever reason it’s the inspiration for a modernized version of the 1938 play “Life of Galileo,” with the new version featuring “a strangely metaphorical yet surreal hi-tech bunker in which Galileo and company live and work.” The minds behind the modernization were motivated by such things as the federal government attempting to censor, misrepresent, and otherwise silence science more than 150 times between January and August of 2018, mostly on climate change topics, according to the beginning of a review of the production by Broadway World. Galileo faced official repression in his time that became the focus of the original play, hence the feeling it was fitting for modern theater. The review declares the new version now playing at Columbia University “one for the ages:” “The juxtaposition of the sterile, mod white environs and period-appropriate props like Galileo’s armillary sphere and ‘tube,’ tellingly work to contemporize (playright Bertolt) Brecht’s piece. In addition, (Set and Screen Designer Jim) Findlay’s ever-effective screen projections, sometimes ethereal, sometimes confrontational, and very Brechtian (referring to the surname of the artistic director), enhance Benesch’s Orwellian interpretation of the work.” Alas – like pretty much every study, campaign and whatnot – the play “doesn’t offer any definitive answers to the current problems facing champions of climate and environmental science, but rather leaves the audience with more troubling questions and perhaps a glimmer of hope that someday stupidity may be defeated, and reason will prevail.” Call it the ultimate climate denalism…

And to wrap things up (we know – those are the five best words written in this marathon)

Random bits of weirdness

Wanna read the "highlights" of Icepeople and other insane rants by its editor about Svalbard?

Download the ebook for whatever donation you think it’s worth at tinyurl.com/y4lgbe3c

CLEANING OF FLATS/HOMES CHEAP, HIGH QUALITY AND FAST! YOU WILL BE SATISFIED! +47 4515 6449
Spacey Invaders (left): Not to pile on to the “junk science” stockpile, but of all the alternative uses we’ve heard about the real use of the Doomsday Vault (zombie sanctuary city, mad-scientist global mind-control HQ, Space Force training center, etc.), the suggestion a bunker 130 meters inside a mountain its being used for astronomy by guy born in the 16th-century probably ranks somewhere in the lower tier of the credibility scale. Magnum oopsus (right): The composer’s inspiration may be cool, but reviews from the inhabitants of this boorish backwater ice village are downright frosty.

WEIRDNESS, from page 4

of madness so far) we present the classical – if not exactly classic – composition “Svalbard, Op. 70, Nr. 1” performed by what we’ll call the Eight And A Half Note Chiptune Ensemble at the YouTube Symphonic Concert Hall. The “name” we’ve bestowed comes from the only “program” notes composer Teodor P. Peev choses to share of the video (“the last pitch is supposed to be an eight and a half note!”), which does at least show the score on the screen of his computer as that grand virtual conductor known as Sibelius conducts it. Our Enquiring Minds posted a comment asking very politely what the hell was in his mind/soul/stimulant when he composed this and the Bulgarian composer quite kindly posted a detailed response noting that, while he hasn’t been to Svalbard, “I always had a kind of fervor for the North.” Among his list of reasons: lack of blinding sunlight (um, four months of midnight sun are just weeks away), there aren’t lethal bugs (oops…”‘Superbug genes’ posing bigger threat than climate change and war found in Svalbard”) and the “culture of Russia interlacing with the North” (yeah, Norwegians have been just thrilled about that lately). He also mentions “the possibility to play the piano blatantly without the risk of getting diverse warnings from my neighbors regarding this within the North.” We’re not exactly sure what that means, but it seems like the moment to bring up the Best of the Public reviews of the performance in response to our invitations for submissions on a local “praise and info” Facebook page (always cheaper and quicker than hiring an actual stringer/staff). Among the opinions: “sounds bloody terrible,” “it does sound terrible,” “too annoying for my taste,” “maybe he was thinking of ‘The Hall of the Mountain King’ and “any music played by a computer sounds wrong” (we disagree). And to offer a surprise ending twist to this long-ever rant by our in-house dungeon trolls, our Evil Overlord with his 20 years as a professional dissenting music critic opined on the opus and…doesn’t hate it. There’s a definite dark structure that despite being highly discordant has the “piano” and “string” combo playing mostly over a consistently repeating vamp or two, so at least it’s not an attempted con job of random human/computer notes. In fact, it really isn’t all that “out there” – remove a few interludes of dense piles of pointless piano pounding and what it most reminds him of is the background music for the dungeon levels of the original Super Mario Brothers.
ALL THE BEAR ESSENTIALS!

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Tempelfjorden traffic ban

Effective immediately due to snowmobilers intruding on bears, seals

By MARK SABBATINI

Editor

A ban on snowmobiles and other motor traffic in a popular travel area of Tempelfjorden is in effect immediately due to several recent incidents of wildlife being disrupted at a time when they are particularly vulnerable. The Governor of Svalbard announced this week.

“We have observed that a female polar bear with two cubs has been living in Tempelfjorden in recent weeks,” Morten Wedege, the governor’s environmental protection manager, said in a prepared statement. “In addition there are several other bears residing in the area.”

At the same time, there is a lot of traffic with snowmobiles and several unfortunate episodes involving snowmobiles on the fjord ice have been observed in recent days. We are now entering a particularly vulnerable period for ice-dependent species such as ring seals and polar bears. The seals are giving birth to their pups on the ice, and during a short period the bear will eat and put on as much as possible to enter a particularly vulnerable period for the walruses are an increasingly common sight.”

The restrictions now in effect at Tempelfjorden are in line with the initial proposal, which prohibits motor traffic within a zone defined by a boundary between Kapp Schultz and Kapp Murdoch (see map above).

“The restrictions now in effect at Tempelfjorden are in line with the initial proposal, which prohibits motor traffic within a zone defined by a boundary between Kapp Schultz and Kapp Murdoch (see map above).”

“Outside this line you can cross the fjord along the shortest navigable route,” the governor’s statement notes.

“When crossing, staying or stopping is not permitted except for safety reasons or technical problems.”

There’s more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

<table>
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<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
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Extended forecast: Sunday, p. cloudy, -9C (-15C), -13C (-20C), light 13:27h; Monday, p. cloudy, -13C (-20C), -14C (-21C), light 13:42h; Tuesday, cloudy, -12C (-18C), -13C (-20C), light 13:58h; Wednesday, cloudy, -7C (-13C), -12C (-19C), light 14:13h;
Coast Guard gains ‘new knowledge’ about Arctic operations protecting stranded trawler until summer

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

A shrimp trawler that put its 14 crew members in fear of their lives when it partially sank in the northernmost part of Svalbard in late December is offering gruelling, but invaluable and unprecedented knowledge to the emergency officials from several agencies involved in rescuing the crew and the subsequent months of salvage operations in the harsh winter environment, according to a report issued following the latest operation earlier this month.

Efforts to secure the *Northguider* in a strait at Hinlopenstredet, in protected nature reserve area between Spitsbergen and Nordaustlandet, until it can removed this summer were successfully completed and “given us new knowledge about operations in such remote, dark and cold areas,” Rune Bergstrøm, operations manager for the Emergency Planning Department at the Coastal Administration, said in a prepared statement detailing the operation.

“No similar operations have been carried out in such demanding waters before that we know of,” he said. “The path that we’re walking on and the cold climate means we are constantly facing new challenges. During the last cruise the crew experienced an effective temperature of down to minus 43 degrees (Celsius),” he said.

Fourteen crew members aboard the trawler were stranded after it was disabled and grounded on an icy shore with a list of about 15 degrees due to water leaking into the engine room. An investigation into the incident was completed in early February by The Governor of Svalbard has been sent to the Norwegian Maritime Directorate for follow-up, but details of the cause have not yet been publicly disclosed.

Rescuers using both of The Governor of Svalbard’s helicopters removed the crew members from the ship a few hours after their distress call in the total darkness of polar winter, with wind and snow complicating efforts. Similar problems delayed and complicated the removal of fuel and other hazardous materials a couple of weeks later.

The most recent operation by officials from the Norwegian Coast Guard and others focused on preventing further damage to the trawler and environment until it can be safely removed. Workers removed additional waste and potentially polluting equipment from the ship, but a more extensive operation was rejected due to the conditions, Bergstrøm said.

“We originally considered starting the removal of the wreckage during this period, but after a thorough assessment of the safety involving emergency personnel and the challenging climatic conditions at this time of the year it was decided that the wreckage should be removed in August,” he said. “The unstable weather we experienced during this operation shows that the assessment was correct. A salvage operation during this period could have been very challenging and risky, and the probability is great that the operation would have been interrupted along the way.”

Crew members installed three different systems with positioning equipment on the ship to be able to keep track of any movements. The sensors can also be used in the event of a “worst-case scenario” where the vessel moves/sinks from its current location and needs to be found. Measures have also been taken making it easier to recover the vessel in such a scenario.

The company that owns the ship and its insurer are working on the salvage plan in cooperation with the Norwegian Coastal Administration, and are responsible for the salvage operation when it happens in August.

The incident is adding fuel to debate about Svalbard’s emergency preparedness due to incidents in recent years including two major avalanches in Longyearbyen and a helicopter crash near Barentsburg that killed eight people. Svalbard’s remoteness means help from the mainland can take a day or more to arrive, a problem magnified when conditions make operations using resources here risky or impossible.

There’s more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.
Sarah Auffret accompanies a ship loaded with trash from a coastal cleanup during the summer of 2018 as the leader of a campaign to reduce plastics use and remove litter from Arctic areas including Svalbard, where she also worked as an expedition guide. She was travelling from Longyearbyen to Nairobi for a United Nations environmental conference when she was among the 157 people killed March 10 in an Ethiopian Airlines crash.

A crusader lost

Sarah Auffret, leader of Clean Up Svalbard campaign, among 157 killed in Ethiopian Airlines crash

By MARK SABBATINI

A British woman leading a large-scale campaign to reduce waste and clear trash from coastlines in Svalbard – where she was working only a few days ago – was among the 157 people killed when Ethiopian Airlines Flight ET 302 crashed earlier this month, according to officials.

Sarah Auffret, a polar guide and expedition leader on cruises in Svalbard and elsewhere in the Arctic, was traveling to Nairobi to discuss efforts to reduce ocean pollution at a United Nations Environment Assembly meeting this week, according to the Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators (AECO), where she worked based from its Tromsø office since May of 2018 as the leader of its Clean Seas Project. The campaign over the past year has included efforts such as getting a large number of cruise lines to eliminate single-use plastics and vastly expand passenger-involved shore cleanups during voyages.

Prior to her trip to Africa, Auffret working on an awareness campaign in Scandinavia.

“I have been travelling across Scandinavia with ‘Chewy,’ a container chewed and scratched by a polar bear on the coast of Franzöya, Svalbard,” she said in a recent interview with the alumni office of the University of Plymouth, where she graduated in 2007. “It was picked up by the Norwegian Coast Guard during a clean up last summer and has become a mascot for Clean Up Svalbard. It was named by the community of Longyearbyen and will continue travelling to raise awareness.”

Reaction from dozens of tourism officials and others in Svalbard and elsewhere was swift and laudatory.

“The loss of Sarah is heartbreaking to the whole expedition cruise community and in particular to AECO where she was very well respected and did a terrific job keeping us all focused on the organization’s most important objective; safeguarding the environment where we operate,” wrote Jorn Henriksen, a Tromsø resident and director of expedition operations for Viking Cruises, in a message on AECO’s Facebook page. “I had the pleasure of meeting Sarah in Longyearbyen just a few days ago. She told me about life in Tromsø – she was...
Activist rapidly grew effort to shrink waste

AUFFRET, from page 9

looking ahead and seemed very happy with being a part of the wonderful AECO family.”

Auffret was one of at least 22 people working for United Nations-affiliated agencies aboard the Kenya-bound flight, a route nicknamed the “U.N. shuttle” because of how often United Nations staff members take it, according to The New York Times. Flags at United Nations offices are flying at half-mast on Monday to honor the victims.

Auffret grew up in the UK town of Brittany and has lived in Australia, Germany, Argentina, Japan, Norway and Port Lockroy on the Antarctic Peninsula. After graduation she joined the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme, which focuses on internationalization initiatives and foreign language education. She was assigned to Naruto High School in Japan because of the town’s twinning with Lüneburg, Germany, assisting German exchange students and teaching introductory German classes for Japanese students.

A longtime interest in environmental issues led to her initiating a coastal cleanup movement in Naruto in 2010.

Such cleanups in Svalbard have grown significantly in number and profile in recent years among both environmental and tourism entities. AECO members have participated in various Arctic cleanup projects for nearly two decades, according to the organization, but the Clean Seas Project and Clean Up Svalbard projects that took full effect beginning in 2018 was a major expansion of the funding and number of member efforts.

“We know that at least 127 cleanups were completed by expedition cruise ships this summer, often in remote coastal areas where they can make a big difference,” Auffret said at the end of last summer, during which she participated in multiple cleanups.

She was scheduled to discuss the Clean Seas Project at the UN conference.

“We are shocked and heartbroken to learn that our colleague and dear friend, Sarah Auffret, was on the Ethiopian Airlines flight ET0302 which crashed soon after takeoff from Addis Ababa Sunday morning, with no survivors,” Auffret’s press release issued the day after the crash stated. “Words cannot describe the sorrow and despair we feel. We have lost a true friend and beloved colleague. Our hearts and thoughts go to Sarah’s family, friends and colleagues at this time of terrible loss.”

The crash minutes after takeoff was the second by a Boeing 737 Max 8 passenger jet in less than five months where all aboard were killed. After a Lion Air flight crashed into the sea near Indonesia with nearly 190 last October, investigators said the pilots appeared to struggle with an automated system designed to keep the plane from stalling – a new feature of the Boeing 737 Max. Boeing is now under intense scrutiny and the jets have been grounded worldwide until further notice.

Norwegian Air uses the MAx jets as part of its regular fleet, but none have been listed regularly as providing service to Longyearbyen.

A volunteer memorial cleanup for interested participants worldwide is being organized by supporters on Auffret’s birthday of June 16. Details are at tinyurl.com/y44bqq73. A Go-FundMe memorial in her name intended to promote environmental stewardship has also been established at tinyurl.com/y6lxa5cr.

There’s more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.
Trym, Trim, Trym again

By MARK SABBATINI  
Editor

Trym Aunevik, 17, can fire the rifles local teachers carry at recess in case of polar bears, but isn’t allowed to attend school because there’s no program for someone with Down’s Syndrome. But the lessons of a lifetime of challenges and endurance are reaping unprecedented rewards for him – and family and supporters at his side since birth – as the three-time national champion swimmer is achieving new heights of victory this week at the Special Olympic World Games in Abu Dhabi.

Born with mental and physical impairments seemingly incompatible with the ability to grow up in the world’s northernmost town, where merely walking to school in a blizzard is potentially fatal for those ill-equipped, Trym is believed to be the first special needs child to do so. Now working in his mom’s cafe instead of sitting in classrooms, his leisure time is dominated by a variety of indoor and outdoor sports that defy his inherent inability to develop muscle tone, including the swimming he started at two months of age that is earning global acclaim after a year of extra-intense training following his selection for the Games.

“Trym set a personal record by a full 11 seconds on the 100-meter butterfly and almost four seconds in the 200-meter freestyle,” the Norwegian Swimming Federation Association announced on its Facebook page after Trym completed his first two events Sunday, noting his next events are Tuesday. “With those he finished in fourth- and fifth-place.”

See OLYMPIAN, page 12
Trym Aunevik, left, bushes butter on cinnamon buns at Freune, the cafe owned by his mother where he works since he cannot attend high school locally because it can’t accommodate his disability. At right, Trym enjoys a trip to the beach during a summer holiday at his family’s second home in Thailand.

‘No way we can go back to Longyearbyen’

OLYMPIAN, from page 11

Those finishes don’t necessarily mean Trym finished in the top five among all swimming at the Games, where 7,000 athletes from 170 countries are gathered. As with everything else in his life, it requires a little extra explanation.

When Trym’s parents learned shortly after his birth he had Down’s Syndrome there was a devastating sense of failure and presumption their adventurous new life in Longyearbyen was over since it was isolated far from his needs. Because of Svalbard’s stringent rules, his mother Tove Beate Eide had to go to the mainland shortly before her due date to give birth in a hospital there with proper maternity facilities. She feared there would be no return trip for the family.

“I said ‘there’s no way we can come back to Longyearbyen,’” she said while accompanying Trym to one of his final training sessions before he departed for the Games.

But return they did, with overwhelming doubts that were fed by years of early struggle and further perceptions of failure.

“I must admit the first year – I would not say it was a black hole – but it really twisted your mind because there was an expectation that was not fulfilled,” said Trym’s father, Terje Aunevik.

From the start, however, the unique challenges of living in Longyearbyen were also accompanied by friends and other community members offering support official policies could not – and, Terje said, a life education unlike any other possible in a small town.

“It’s a good side of the Longyearbyen society because this never would have been possible without the people around him,” he said. There’s also a freedom being able to do things such as walk everywhere since in a big city “for him to adopt to things like train schedules is really difficult there.”

Trym’s parents fought their doubts by trying to provide a normal upbringing as best they could, including the first of now-countless trips to the public swimming pool with other new parents shortly after returning home.

“We took him from when he was two months old to baby swim,” Tove said.

Friends also took him to those sessions when his parent couldn’t, as well as taking on the challenges involved with raising him beginning in those first few months. Among them was Lisbeth Eilertsen, a teacher who at the time was working in the kindergarten (which in Longyearbyen accepts infants as well as preschoolers) who was won over by stubbornness, including a persona of never giving up.

“Working in the kindergarten I said ‘I want him – nobody else,’” she said while sitting with Trym in the library during one of his quieter moments before the Games.

But being a kindergartener in Longyearbyen means a lot more than swing sets and sandboxes (they have their own reindeer hunting quota, after all), and so it was with Trym thanks to people like Eilertsen.

“She has the patience I don’t,” his father said. “She the first able to get him on skis. That

See OLYMPIAN, page 13
Family shares journey from 'failure' to fame

OLYMPIAN, from page 12

was really quite amazing.”

Trym swam in his first meet at the age of seven and “you could really seem him fire up,” Terje said. That led to years of increasingly competitive efforts culminating three gold, two silver and one bronze finish at the national Landsstevnet swimming competitions in Gjøvik during the fall of 2018 that earned him a trip to the World Games.

Standing near Trym during much of the recent training session before he departed, as with so many others over the years, was his younger sister Vår to supervise his technique. Standing on the starting block time and again, he carefully under guidance made the incredibly precise adjustments in stance befitting a national champion swimmer, very much as he has in countless other aspects of his life ranging from icing cinnamon rolls at his mother’s cafe to shooting at the rifle range.

Trym, in an interview shortly before departing for Abu Dhabi, said his focus preparing for the Games has been on “doing the right things when diving, turning and swimming.”

“I’m training more,” he said. “I swim four times a week, do circular training once a week and football once a week.”

Even a proper world-class training diet – an implausible thought when he, like many with his impairment, was interested in eating little more than bread – is an acquired skill. Trym, at 172 centimeters tall and just shy of 60 kilograms, said he’s currently building strength with pasta, pancakes, cheese, smoothies and chocolate (and, yes, plenty of bread).

Trym is one of four Norwegian swimmers competing in the Games but, much like he is a unique and fascinating presence in Longyearbyen, he is also likely to be one in a social and physical climate that’s the polar opposite of his hometown.

“I think people may ask about polar bears,” he said. As he tells peers at other meets, “the bears are not in the city, but in the valley.”

Traveling far to a strange land where temperatures may be nearly 60C warmer than back home doesn’t bother him since he travels with most of his family to their second home in Thailand every summer. As for expectations, he has ambitions but they aren’t foremost on his mind.

“I think maybe first place or second place and I’m looking forward to swimming with people from the rest of the world,” he said. “It’s also OK not to win. It’s the experience of going to Abu Dhabi and being able to swim.”

Trym attempt to win medals will be in a sense against other swimmers at the Games, as he will be placed in a competition class based on his assessed skills. But during the events themselves medal rankings are based on levels set by times completed, not how he finishes among all the competitors.

“It will be really interesting to see what level he is at internationally,” his father Terje said.

Terje has, of course, been as tireless in his encouragement as he hopes his son proves to be during the Games, but is still able to assess the teen’s strengths and weaknesses objectively.

“He has a unique technique and is very strong,” Terje said, adding there’s still room for improvement with the latter. “He moves very efficiently in water. You can see it when he does the butterfly or the crawl. He’s not only using power, he’s very smooth.”

As for his son’s biggest challenge to overcome?

“It’s still really challenging going the last mile,” he said. “He hates to be exhausted.”

Trym also recognizes he’s likely to fare better in some events, including the butterfly and freestyle events Sunday, than others.

“It’s difficult to swim on my backside,” he said.

What’s given him the endurance to keep swimming, not just during an individual event, but for so many years when succumbing to his genetic weaknesses would be so much easier?

“I enjoy swimming because I’m good at it, and I like people watching me and cheering me on,” Trym said.

There’s been no shortage of people rooting for him back home in sports and real life, even
when circumstances revive the feelings of failu-
re his parents felt during those early years. Last
year as he was earning a spot on the world sta-
ge, he was denied one at Longyearbyen School
because there aren’t teachers able to provide
what is considered an officially acceptable high
school education due to the limited social sup-
port resources the Norwegian government pro-
vides Svalbard.

The setback again had his parents con-
templating moving to the mainland, which now
would mean giving up his mother’s highly-
successful cafe and his father’s standing as
head of the Svalbard Businesses Association
(plus his plans to run for mayor in this fall’s
election). But it was the personal losses and be-
lief that Trym shouldn’t be denied a chance for
a life here that were painful – and prompted his
parents to dig in yet again with the persistence
their son has shown in the pool.

“I’m convinced that it’s really possible for
him to make a contribution to society,” his fat-
ther said. “I believe he can learn anything. Even
we underestimated him. We were really sur-
prised at what he can learn, even now at Fruene
where he’s now even learning things like the
register.”

Trym began working at the cafe in somet-
hing of a work-study arrangement last fall, be-
ning with simpler duties such as bussing dis-
hes and gradually expanding to where he can
now do most of the same duties as his co-wor-
kers.

“It’s all about repetition,” Terje said. “With
others you may only repeat it five times. With
Trym maybe you have to repeat it 300 times and
that’s just the beginning.”

Terje said his son is on a “four-year plan
where he can get a paper saying he’s almost a
chef,” although when it comes to what Trym ac-
tually wants to do with his life is an open book.

“It depends on what’s on television,” Terje
said. “If it’s about police then he wants to do so-
thing with the police like any other kid.”

Trym said he misses experiencing high
school with his peers and would like to be in the
company of others like him on a regular basis,
but plenty is happening now to keep him
fulfilled.

“It’s OK to work at Fruene,” he said. “I meet
my friends, sometimes at Fruene and sometimes
at the swimming pool. I would like to be with ot-
er people with Down’s Syndrome. But I have a
good life in Longyearbyen.”

Instead of socializing with peers in the class-
room during the day, he chats about sports with
the coal miners and other regulars who gather at
the cafe each morning. But he hangs out during
evenings and weekends with his longtime
friends, who also threw him a surprise birthday
party at the school he can no longer attend last
year.

“I honestly think he’s a happy guy,” Terje
said. “He enjoys his friends and he enjoys his
life, even if it’s not friends in the traditional
way.”

Besides swimming, football and skiing,
Trym is also active in hockey, climbing and
exploring (with others since “we get those
weird times when he starts exploring places
he’s not supposed to,” as his father puts it). Terje
said his son has also shown a remarkable
energy recently for dancing.

“He actually did that on his own,” Terje
said. “He started to train like crazy on those
dance routines. That is one of the things he can
do for a long time without getting exhausted.
He is really strong when it comes to balance
and body control.”

Trym Aunevik greets customers at Fruene, where talking about sports with coal miners and others regulars is taking the place of socializing with peers.
Two-timing sun

One of its most spectacular Solfestuka appearances ever – one day after its first actual appearance

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

Not that any of the hundreds of people cared as the sun made a glorious appearance over the southern mountains under a cloudless sky at about 12:50 p.m. during the annual return-of-the-sun festival March 8 on the old hospital steps near Svalbard Church.

“The sun is back in Longyearbyen!” came the emcee’s shout as the crowd roared and, yes, that much is true enough. It was also one of the most spectacular sunrises among the decades of celebrations, which often are partially or completely obscured by clouds, as only the mildest of breezes added to the minus 18 degrees Celsius chill.

But contrary to the annual proclamations in everything from local Tweets to global headlines, it wasn’t for the first time this year on those ceremonial stairs as the first rays of light actually touched them briefly exactly 24 hours earlier.

“I was really bewildered, not expecting it,” Marion Prudhon, a guide and occasional staff writer for Icepeople, wrote in an e-mail. She was on a tour with Birgit Edgeworth of Australia, when they visited the stairs from the hospital that was destroyed in World War II on the day before the ceremony.

“I came here last year to the North Pole, and I heard about the stairs and the sun coming back on March 8, so I wanted to come back this year and see it,” Edgeworth said. Alas, she was going on a trip outside of town on Friday, but nonetheless got to enjoy “dozens of seconds” in the light at the famous spot.

“I don’t want to speak too much about it, but this is fantastic – this was my goal and I saw it,” she said.

Such “off-date” appearances happen from time to time due to leap year, tiny shifts in the sun’s long-term cycle and so on. Besides, most folks already know Longyearbyen’s first official sunrise was Feb. 16 and plenty of them ventured beyond the mountains keeping the town in shadow to feel the first rays and share photos.

See SUNLIGHT, page 16
Sun beckons twice; crowd way more than that

SUNLIGHT, from page 15

of them with the world before the ceremonial date.

So the light and warmth of the ceremony – the highlight of the weeklong Solfestuka festival that is Longyearbyen’s most-popular annual event – are as much about the community as actually getting to see the sun. As always, the 20-minute gathering was dominated by the children’s music group Polargospel, which spent most of their time on the steps singing several traditional sun songs and then helping lead the crowd in the chant to coax the sun to peer over the horizon (which in English translates to “Sun, sun come again! The sun is our best friend!” – but rest assured the cadence and rhyme is vastly superior in Norwegian).

First, however, another annual ritual took place as Ingeborg Andersen, 11, a fifth-grade student, was presented with a framed copy of the sun she drew that was selected as the official Solfestuka logo in a competition among local youths for the official Solfestuka logo during the sunrise ceremony. somewhat brief when answering questions about what inspired her drawing and what the sun’s return means to her, also she didn’t shy away from noting she really wished she could have included red in the design, but the rules limited her to four colors.

Then it was time for the annual chant and, if the crowd missed the early first appearance, at least the spirit of seeking an early arrival prevailed as the shouts began a good seven minutes before the edge of the solar orb appeared, resulting in a few short interludes while everyone gave their vocal cords a rest.

But appear it did to rousing applause, after which a good portion of the crowd departed for warmer spaces and/or to get back to work after what subjectively might be considered one of the best TGIF lunch breaks possible anywhere on Earth. Others stayed for the traditional post-ceremony “sun buns” and food/drinks nearby at Svalbard Church.

The festival’s youth-oriented focus will continue with a party for students at the Longyearbyen Youth Club and an afternoon of outdoor recreation/music/food at the just-opened ski hill near the center of town starting at 1 p.m. March 9. There will also be concerts starting at 7 p.m. at Kulturhuset.

There’s more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.

Revisit every Icepeople since the first issue (except for some recent ones we’re catching up on) icepeople.net/pdf
An ensemble cast of northern lights illuminate the stage at Huset for the 25th performance of an annual revue satirizing the happenings of the past year with skits and songs. Performing more than 30 pieces – mostly new, with a few trips back into the past quarter-century, the lineup of long-time regulars featured a glowing sales pitch (cough) to the many books written by a recently departed longtime priest, a visit to the set of a reality (cough) TV series featuring Longyearbyen's last coal miners, a polar bear paying a visit to humanfolk express his ecstasy (cough) at becoming a viral video porn star and more. Alas for those reading this, the title of the show performed the first weekend of Solfestuka – “25 År og Kull Verdt” – can't be properly translated into English. All photos by Mark Sabbatini / Icepeople.
We're 10. Whoopie

It'd be stupid to congratulate ourselves, so maybe this is about sex

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

So this is our big blowout 10-year anniversary fishwrapper, such as it is.

Proper decorum and business sense suggests some kind of self-congratulatory introduction touting our many priceless contributions and highlights as The Coolest Newspaper on Earth. So consider that done.

As for what's actually in this week's issue, it's mostly just more of everything happening here that's made Svalbard such an endlessly amazing place that we've been more than willing to panhandle for change on sidewalks (and outside the port-a-potties set up for cruise tourists every summer since, after all, we're also The Coolest Bathroom Reader on Earth), wash cars and occasionally break bones to reap donations out of pity.

The only retrospective stuff is 1) a reprint of the first-ever issue so readers can assess for themselves what the fishwrapper has evolved into over a decade (and allows me to share just a few of the many ways it now makes me cringe) and 2) a roundup of the "top 10" stories by year so people can see the striking ways Svalbard is a different place than a decade ago when I lost everything at Gamle Sykehuset, when I was forced from an avalanche zone apartment a year later, twice when I was hospitalized in Tromsø with broken bones, etc.). If I'm going to mention one name in those typical "too much to thank, but here's a bunch" lists, it of course has to be Anne Lise Klungseth Sandvik who on multiple occasions has rallied her sizeable crowd of like-minded good Samaritans to rescue me (when I lost everything at Gamle Sykehuset, when I was forced from an avalanche zone apartment a year later, twice when I was hospitalized in Tromsø with broken bones, etc.). If I'm going to mention two, it's Rishi Gokhale, 11, who last fall started a GoFundMe that raised tens of thousands of kroner right as I was literally packing and asking if anyone here wanted to take over payments to the fishwrapper's web host so the existing content would survive.

I've been asked numerous times where I see the fishwrapper and Svalbard ten years from now — and given what's changed for both in ten years the question always leaves me looking more befuddled than usual. Thinking ten days into the future is a stretch, both for sanity's sake (bad) and because there's usually so much happening I can write about on a given day all I know is if I'll still be in this endless stressful limbo tomorrow life that's enough.

BTW, it turns out this wasn't about sex. But you read this to the end so the teaser worked.
Crazy for the sun

Weeklong Solfestuka celebrates end of polar night on Sunday

It takes a sturdy crowd to party hard after a long night.

But those in Longyearbyen appear more than up to the challenge after enduring the longest night of pretty much anybody. A weeklong series of concerts, theater performances, historical presentations, sledding contests and other activities are scheduled during the annual Solfestuka celebration beginning Sunday.

Residents who last saw the sun in late October will gather at Svalbard Kirke at 11 a.m., where a "glimpse of light" service and concert will be preceded by a welcoming ceremony outside.

"There the sun will be, if it is not cloudy, at approximately a quarter past 11," said Roger Zahl Ødegård, cultural advisor and project manager for the festival.

Cloudy skies and snow flurries, with a temperature of about -5°C and winds to 9 kph, were forecast Sunday as of press time Wednesday.

Ødegård can't say if Solfestuka is Svalbard's most popular festival, but with a 25-item lineup "this is the festival with the biggest variety of events."

"It has always been a celebration of the sun since the beginning of Longyearbyen's history," he said. The festival was one day long until about 25 years ago, but "people wanted more."

About 150 to 200 local residents are helping organize and participating in Solfestuka, including about 40 youths volunteering for duties such as taking tickets and selling merchandise, Ødegård said.

See SOLFEST, page 4

Seeds of hope, concern after vault's first year

Politics, perceptions of climate change dominate conference

As birthday parties go, it's something of a downer when the conversation is about getting people to worry about a food crisis a century from now when paying for groceries today is a struggle.

But those celebrating said the current global economic crisis offers an opportunity as they try -- literally -- sowing seeds of hope for the future.

Warnings went unheeded about reckless financial behavior by politicians and consumers more interested in immediate gratification, agreed many of the scientists, agriculture officials and others gathering for the first anniversary of the Svalbard Global Seed Vault. Similar apathy and denial about climate change are widespread despite an avalanche of scary research, making preventative projects such as the vault a seedy birthday party

Preparing for global warming is chilly work.

Sylvi Lundgren, a 28-year-old biology student, found that out gathering seeds around Svalbard in blustery rainstorms last fall. From there the seeds were stored in a series of progressively colder environments

"Each seed we store inside that vault has the ability to do just that, to save the world."

– Lars Peder Brekk

before reaching their home for potentially thousands of years in the Svalbard Global Seed Vault.

See VAULT, page 4

What IS this thing adding to our litter?

You're holding -- probably at arm's length -- the premier issue of the world's northernmost alternative newspaper.

It's certifiable as a collector's item, worthy of space next to the George W. Bush action figure and David Beckham L.A. Galaxy jersey on the shelf.

Newspapers are falling everywhere, so you don't even have to meet me to know my brain's a few degrees short of the defrost cycle. Plus it's not like I know all that much about Svalbard after moving here four months ago and spending the winter trying to learn Norsk by watching subtitles on "The Simpsons."

See ROOKIE, page 2
Getting off to a humble start

ROOKIE, from page 1

But I'm doing it anyway. Because I love journalism, I love the area and it's your wisdom, not mine, that will fill these pages.

Why "alternative" instead of some other nonsense hype like "northernmost English newspaper"?

Mostly because it's always been my dream to edit an alternative newspaper, but also it's the only kind I can do here with any credibility. People fluent in Norwegian who read Svalbardposten and other "real" newspapers available locally will probably dismiss much of this rag have to do the work. We do have to do the work.

True, but as NBC used to say in an annoying ad pitch to justify reruns, "if you haven't seen it, it's new to you."

One of the things I heard when I first visited Svalbard more than a year ago was there are a lot of English-speaking students, scientists, tourists and others who can't follow the local and regional news in Norwegian, which is when I began plotting my vocational suicide.

Also, alternative newspapers ideally offer a different, perhaps more in-depth, perspective on a few subjects each issue without trying to cover everything. Even if I were up to speed on current events there's no way I could hope to keep up with all that's newsworthy on my own. Thanks (a big thanks) to Svalbardposten allowing me to run their headlines in English, with translations of articles available through the icepeople site at www.icepeople.net, I don't have to try.

I've been editing and writing for newspapers for more than 20 years, including a couple of half-year seasons editing The Antarctic Sun at the McMurdo research facility the U.S. has at the bottom of the world. The focus was on polar science, politics and life, and I hope Icepeople can offer much of the same, along with additional topics of obvious local interest such as mining.

It's crucial to note I'm not seeking to compete with the local newspaper of record. Copies of Icepeople are free and I'm not trying to squeeze local businesses by actively soliciting ads (although I will gladly run them if approached). For those wondering how I plan to make any money to keep this thing going I'll note 1) I saved my pennies to try something like this someday, 2) I have freelance and other writing work I still do and 3) there's a foolish hope I can reap some income from the Web content, which will feature articles, photos, music, diversions and other extras not found here.

The idea this publication might become profitable is probably drawing guffaws from those observing this first issue is more of a flyer than a newspaper. Think of it as what restaurants call a "soft opening," where I'm start low-key and cautious as I evaluate who might be reading this and what subjects are likely to be of most interest.

Having just celebrated the one-year anniversary of the Svalbard Global Seed Vault and with Solfestuka coming up next week, this seemed like the right time to jump in. The plan is for issues to come out on Tuesdays, but the usual hitches that seem to plague any startup means this debut issue is a few days late. The next issue is scheduled for March 17, with publication planned every two weeks until I'm up-to-speed enough to go weekly – hopefully no more than a month or two.

Finally, the most useful thing I can get from you – even more so than money – is feedback. Let me know what works, what doesn't and when I've screwed up. Every newspaper does and, while it's gut-wrenching to hear about it, it's the only way to learn from mistakes and correct them.

My phone (41 51 46 38) and e-mail (marksabbatin@yahoo.com) usually work and I spend an unhealthy ratio of my waking hours soaking up caffeine at Fruene. I'm the guy with the bizarre hair, bloodshot eyes and massive Powerbook. Don't worry – I'm not that scary. It just happens to be a look that serves me well when travelling through primitive countries where I'd rather be mistaken for someone likely to rob tourists than being one myself. Now that I'm here and can't hide under 14 layers of clothes as summer approaches, I'll probably get a haircut.

Thanks for reading. It takes up valuable minutes of your life that you can never get back, so it's much appreciated.

'in real life I'm a writer, not a waiter'

(for those wanting to contribute material to this fine publication)

We can definitely use all the help we can get.

Our submissions policy will run in the box at left in every issue, but in general if you can write, photograph, record or videotape it, we're probably interested. This doesn't include things like shilling for businesses or venting personal disputes. Also, we edit articles for clarity and conformity to newspaper style, but will contact you about changes unless you're really trying hard to avoid us.

Selling polar bears to Australians

(for those wanting to purchase advertising in this fine publication)

We won't be knocking on anyone's door trying to sell ads, since the only employee actually working in Longyearbyen is a journalist who would like to maintain his objectivity.

We are, however, more than happy to run ads from people who approach us and will even do so for free on a limited trial basis so you can determine if it's worth paying for.

Ads must be camera ready or easy to design, a standard determined by whoever might actually have to do the work. We do have some experience at this, so if you're willing to pay for a more elaborate ad design we're certainly willing to listen.
Warming up to climate change a challenge

SEEDS from page 1
difficult to pursue.

"Again I would say what's going on in this area is a bit of armchair behaviour," said Sam Dryden, CEO of Emergent Genetics LLC, a private developer and marketer of biotechnology-enhanced seeds. "Consumers want a lot of food, they want it cheap and and they want it fast. They don't even care about the nutritional quality."

Governments want economic growth and stability, Dryden said, while industrial food processors "want increased sales, reduced costs and higher earnings".

"Once they get a model to do that they're highly resistant to change," he said.

His remarks were part of three days of presentations and discussions by more than 50 participants Feb. 25-27, including a midday visit to the seed vault on the anniversary of its Feb. 26 opening. The vault, buried more than 100 meters inside the permafrost of a mountain about a kilometer from the Longyearbyen airport, is designed to store 4.5 million seed varieties provided by countries and institutions who have exclusive access to them in the event of a catastrophe.

The vault generally got only passing mention during the seminars, which focused on the likely impacts of climate change, the challenges agriculture faces and what is necessary to make it an issue people are willing to confront.

Temperatures are likely to increase 2°C to 3.5°C (3.6°F to 6.3°F) degrees by 2100, with the lower estimate occurring even if utopian policies on carbon emissions are enacted, said David Battisti, a professor of atmospheric sciences at the University of Washington. He said we now produce carbon dioxide at 100 to 1,000 times the rate nature can convert it into oxygen.

Earth is already "the warmest it's ever been for many millions of years" after a .8°C (1.5°F) degree increase during the past 100 years, Battisti said. By 2050 large portions of the world's equatorial region will be experiencing record seasonal heat, along with more severe but less frequent storms, and by 2100 such conditions will exist for virtually the entire planet.

"I don't think we should be discussing the details of what happened the past 100 years because what happened in the past 100 years is small" compared to the future, he said.

That threat is why "crop diversity" was the buzzword from many of the presenters at the conference. M.S. Swaminathan, 83, a member of India's parliament known as the "father of the green revolution" in that country, said global vulnerability to vanishing species is already being felt in drastic ways such as a severe rice shortage last year that caused deadly food riots and sent prices skyrocketing.

A "blend of traditional wisdom and modern science" is necessary to cope, Swaminathan said. Certain species of rice are highly adaptable to varying water levels and drought conditions, for instance, which allowed some crops to survive a 2004 tsunami that killed 225,000 people and displaced more than 1 million more in 11 countries primarily in Southeast Asia.

"They would have disappeared, but some farmers from their own knowledge knew they were more resistant to seawater and were able to retain them," Swaminathan said.

Crop breeding programs and other preventative measures aren't getting the funding or other support necessary, said Cary Fowler, executive director of The Global Crop Diversity Trust.

"There are a number of seed banks around the world, not all of which are operating at maximum capacity or up to international standards," he said. "A number of those seeds are dying."

The trust is working to replace such seeds, but "we really don't have the crop diversity in any one country that any one country is going to need to make that transition" caused by climate change, Fowler said. He showed a slide of the last Norse church in Greenland, now in ruins as the Norse farmers refused to follow the example of natives who became hunters when a cool period hit the area.

"We can say it's too far down road in the future, so we don't have to worry about it now," he said. We can say it's too expensive. But history teaches us that societies that don't make adjustments to climate change end up in photographs like this."

Scary statistics and recent catastrophes aren't proving enough to get people to take the threat seriously, many at the conference agreed.

Particular concern was expressed about the U.S., where polls show residents are roughly divided on whether humans are responsible and about one-third say global warming is nonexistent. A front-page Sunday story in the New York Times on March 1 headlined "Obama's Backing Raises Hopes for Climate Pact" drew at least as many derisive remarks as supportive ones in the readers' comments section.

"The very greatest benefit of this recession is this: no American politician will be dumb enough to throw serious money at the ludicrous, pseudo-religious, moralizing 'hysteria of the elites' that is 'global warming,' " one commenter wrote.

There's more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.
Seed vault seen as p.r. tool in warming fight

VAULT from page 1

For dignitaries visiting the mountainside excavation on its first anniversary Feb. 26 it's probably the only time -4°C -- the temperature of the outer chamber -- felt, as one person said, "like being on the beach" compared to the -18°C vault.

"I think you can tell speeches down here tend to be short," said Cary Fowler, executive director of the Global Crop Diversity Trust.

Visitors walked the 130 meters from the entrance to the outer chamber carrying plastic bins with some of the 90,000 seed samples, weighing a total of four tons, the vault received as a "birthday present." There are 1,400 agricultural gene banks in more than 100 countries, but Fowler said the Svalbard facility is the "largest and most important library of life in the world."

"I can honestly say this has the most diversity of any seed vault in the world, but more importantly this is the fail safe if all other seed vaults in the world fail," he said.

It's also an attention getter in the struggle to raise awareness about the threat climate change poses to the world's food supply and the debate about what preventative measures are appropriate, many at the celebration agreed.

"The notion of doomsday and the polar bear is dynamite," said Emilie Prisner, director general of Bioversity International, a global nonprofit research organization. "You can use the vault as a tool that speaks to people's hearts."

The vault's opening received extensive media coverage worldwide and the anniversary, while getting considerably less press, was still headline news on everything from the BBC to science journals. Not all the coverage has been positive, with critics arguing in interviews and articles that seed vaults offer false security against the continuing shrinking of viable agricultural land, with control in the hands of a relatively few entities willing to rely on questionable methods such as genetic modification to sustain crops.

Proponents argue seed vaults are an additional method to cope with climate change, not an attempt to discourage alternatives, and the number of seeds collected is sufficient to affect growers in specific areas.

The Svalbard vault now houses more than 20 million seeds from 400,000 unique samples and has room for more than 4 million additional samples from a U.S. backup collection that originally came from 151 countries.

There's more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.

Solfestuka perfect for those feeling crazy after winter

SOLFEST from page 1

One youth, Nicholas Øverli, a 3rd grade student, is also ensuring those at Solfestuka see the sun regardless of how bad the weather gets. His drawing, selected from 96 students submitting pictures of the sun, is beaming from festival decorations and merchandise.

Ødegård said the "happy eyes" and tongue hanging out made it a winner.

"It's not like all the others," he said. "It seems a little crazy, this sun, maybe inspired by all the crazy weather."

Crazy seems to be an attitude Ødegård is encouraging (as if the polar wasn't enough), noting one of Solfestuka's big events is a sledding contest at 1 p.m. Saturday at Höithham.

"We hope people will create crazy sledges," he said. Prizes will be awarded for the fastest, craziest and worst sledges.

Saturday night features a trio of bands playing on two floors of Kinosaalen starting at 10 p.m. The Longyearbyen Storband will play standards downstairs, while the Howlin’ Huskies and The Twistarooms perform garage rock, R&B "and everything else they can do to encourage crazy behavior on the dance floor," Ødegård said.

Another featured concert is Norwegian singer Jonas Fjeld teaming up with the U.S. band Chatham County Line for an eclectic country/rock/folk/bluegrass gig at 7:30 p.m. Sunday at Brasseri Nansen. A trio of concerts are scheduled at Kroa, including the rock band Norsk Pibullsanatorium at 10 p.m. Wednesday, Eastern-tinged Norsk-pop group Real Ones at 10 p.m. Thursday and local rock band Schneerenburgh at 10 p.m. Friday.

Other featured events, according to the festival's Web site:

- A presentation by Birger Løvland and Gunnar Sanbo of historical postcards and other material in a "glimpses from a tourist trip to Svalbard from 1894" at 7:30 p.m. Monday at the library.
- "Free After Amundsen," a lecture by Harald Kippenes about the 1911 race to the South Pole at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday at the University Centre In Svalbard.
- "Og bakom synger kullstrupene," a stage performance by Spitsbergen Revylag making light of local events from the past year, at 7:30 p.m. Friday and 7 p.m. Saturday at Huset.

Tickets are required for many of the evening events and Ødegård said they can sell out. Sales for most such events begin 30 minutes before show time.

More information and a complete schedule is available at www.solfest.no. An English translation of the page is available at www.icepeople.net.
They usually seem to be about coal, bears, disasters and doomsday, but the climate is always changing

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

While it's supposed to be a conventional top-10 list, one great thing about being our own boss means having the flexibility to declare it a top-11 list one year when we accidentally included one too many and a top-12 list when we didn't want to whittle it down further. Alas, it also means that for posterity our first-year list is only a top-five since we're unable to find anything in our print or online archives showing we published anything beyond that. So ending this introduction on that lame note, here's The Way It Was during each of the past ten years:

2009 (we only dialed things up to 5)

Hot debate, icy economy in '09

We're officially a bunch of fun-loving people, according to the government, a good thing since overall it was a pretty crummy year.

The economy tanked, taking coal mining and tourism with it. A lot of noise was made about climate change being most severe here, but not much actually doing anything about it resulted. Almost nothing seemed to go right for the Russians.

In some ways, what didn't happen was the best news in Svalbard for 2009. The Norwegian government didn't make startling changes in the area's long-term strategic plan, ensuring mining will remain the dominant industry. A major shipwreck spilled oil in one of the...
world's most pristine wildlife areas, but didn’t wreak environmental havoc. Norway's biggest earthquake ever struck off the coast, but doesn’t even get further mention here because there was no damage.

There were feel-good moments as well, including a record-length helicopter rescue of a man at the northern tip of Greenland. Also some bizarre ones, such as environmentalists blockading the Svea mine for a day in Svalbard’s first political protest and, despite eluding criminal charges, paying the price when customs agents found too much undeclared beer on their ship.

1. Store Norske announces major cutbacks
2. “White paper” recommends continuing coal mining
3. U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon visits
4. Tourism plummets after a strong 2008
5. Cargo ship Petrosavodsk crashes off Bjørnøya

2010

Bad bosses, bears: Store Norske corruption, attack on kayaker in tent most notable

The world’s hottest year on record was also the year of businessmen, bears and basins behaving badly.

A scandal shaking the financial and executive foundations of Svalbard’s largest employer to their core dominated headlines the second half of 2010. The world fixated on a different type of sensational misbehavior as polar bears displayed their ferocity against humans and their possessions, most notably a kayaker trying to paddle around Spitsbergen. And food grinders intended to keep the kitchen plumbing of all Longyearbyen homes clear instead mucked them up in many ways – when they weren’t in danger of catching fire.

But the news wasn’t all bad, as 3D movies and a vastly upgraded performing arts stage offered a diversion at the end of the year. Russians in Barentsburg saw a reversal to their years of misfortune when mining resumed after a fire halted operations in 2008. And there was always the unusual zaniness, such as the Nazis invading Svalbard as part of a record-selling video game and Longyearbyen’s airport being named as one of the world’s 18 strangest.

1. Store Norske corruption scandal
2. Polar bear attacks kayaker in tent
3. Huset closes/Kulturhuset opens
4. Food grinders muck up home sinks
5. Health care services under scrutiny
6. Warming poses new bear threats
7. Russians lose helicopter tour case
8. New security requirements enacted
9. Mining resumes in Barentsburg
10. Fuel dispute threatens Ny-Ålesund

2011

Tragedy, then triumphs: Two local teens shot at Utøya, first fatal polar bear attack since 1995 overshadow year’s events

It was a year whose reminiscence will always begin with a moment of respectful silence.

Two incidents claiming the lives of teenagers, including the July 22 attacks by Anders Behring Breivik that history will record as one of Norway’s greatest tragedies, were Svalbard’s biggest news stories of 2011. Longyearbyen’s Johannes Buo, 14, was among Breivik’s 77 victims, while Horatio Chapple, 17, of the United Kingdom, became Svalbard’s first fatality from a polar bear attack since 1995.

But one of year’s most inspiring stories also resulted from Brevik’s attack, as Viljar Hanssen, now 18, recovered from life-threatening injuries and became the youngest-ever member of Longyearbyen’s municipal council when he was elected in October after campaigning from his hospital bed.

There was also good news for Store Norske after a disastrously costly corruption scandal in 2010 that was the top story that year. A new coal mine at Lunckefjell essentially cleared its last major hurdles days before the end of 2011, which will add four years to Longyearbyen’s dominant industry, which after a century is facing a relatively short lifespan.

But Norway’s government put environmental concerns above economic ones in a revised East Svalbard management plan that severely limits access for human activities. A final plan is expected to be voted on by Parliament in 2012, with the tourism industry and local politicians expressing concerns.

Another environmental concern was Svalbard’s most serious rabies outbreak in 30 years. The discovery of infected animals in September resulted in a lengthy effort to kill as many foxes as possible near Longyearbyen and an ongoing ban on dogs being outdoors without a leash or human supervision.

Snaring the world’s attention was Prince Harry’s North Pole trip in March and April.

1. Two Longyearbyen teens shot at Utøya
3. New Lunckefjell mine clears hurdles.
4. Revised East Svalbard plan limits access.
5. Most serious rabies outbreak in 30 years.
6. New municipal council elected, including first female leader, Christin Kristoffersen.
and her son becomes youngest-ever member as Viljar Hanssen, 18, recovers from life-threatening Utøya injuries
7. Robert Hermanssen pleads guilty, other legal resolutions in Store Norske corruption scandal
8. Longyearbyen residents see huge utility bill increases to pay for new facilities
9. Russia’s cooperation/conflict escalates, with beginning of massive cleanup marred by illegal construction and threats after illegal trawlers are detained
10. Britain’s Prince Harry accompanies wounded soldiers on North Pole expedition

2013
Bad bosses, bears – Russian mining accidents, city gov’t makeover, return of Norwegian Air, cruise ship decline among top events

Offering yet more proof Svalbard is truly a world apart, Norway’s biggest story of 2013 didn’t get any coverage from the local paper of record.
While the nation voted in a new Conservative-led leadership that’s promising drastic changes, the local impact isn’t likely to be felt until late in 2014, if not beyond. Instead, the most newsworthy events of 2013 were – as usual – a mix with either more local or global impact.

1. Deadly negligence in Barentsburg
2. Extreme Makeover: City Edition
3. Flying the frigid skies
4. Coal: From horrible to merely chaotic
5. Sinking prospects in Ny-Ålesund
6. Climate change indeed a ‘hoax’
7. Plight of the polar bear films
8. News by newbies
9. The great health care scare
10. Savory is out, sweet is in

2014 (the list goes to 11)
Coal in hell: Store Norske’s mining crisis tops year of record heat that may permanently reshape the archipelago
It was a year of record heat that drastically reshaped Svalbard’s environment in every sense of those words.
Most locals are likely to remember 2014 as being when Store Norske entered its biggest economic crisis ever, possibly signalling the end of coal mining as Longyearbyen’s biggest industry for the first time in the city’s peacetime history. But both people and other life forms encountered unprecedented hardships in other ways due to freakish heat waves that may signal the end of the Arctic’s coolness factor.
Even good news was tainted. A significant increase in tourism overwhelmed tour-related businesses at times, resulting in miserable days for locals and tourists alike. The Governor of Svalbard got a new rescue helicopter and a fancy new service vessel, but was forced to respond to more incidents than usual involving people unprepared and unaware of the area’s hazards.

1. Record loss at Store Norske leads to mass layoffs, uncertain future
2. Freaky February sets tone for warmest year on record
3. Mining, rescue and other employers fear worker exodus due to tax increase
4. Russia’s political crisis adds to safety, economic turmoil in Barentsburg
5. Attempted sale of large land parcel spooks many, but buyer remains elusive
6. Increasingly aggressive polar bears visit settlements, refuse to leave
7. A good year for tourism – sometimes too good – as dark times lie ahead
8. Governor gets upgraded rescue capabilities, needs them immediately
9. Oil activity creeps close to – and sometimes over – Svalbard’s borders
10. ‘Nine dead after cruise ship accident in Svalbard’ (this was a rescue exercise)
11. New Lunckefjell mine opens

2015 (the list goes to 12)
INTO BLACKNESS: Svalbard’s lights extinguished – for better and worse – during year of historic reverence and turmoil
It was already a shell-shocked community beginning to say their farewells to possibly a quarter of the town’s residents, with those left behind worrying about the future of a town with a decimated economic foundation.
Then the avalanche struck.
Either alone ranks among the most significant events in Longyearbyen’s history. Together they may reshape the town more dramatically than at any time since it was almost entirely destroyed during World War II.
Both will completely reshape the town – in vastly different ways during the coming year – although each will require a massive rebuilding process that will take years. New industries such as tourism and research will need to begin an era of rapid growth to replace coal mining after its century as the dominant industry in Longyearbyen. And hundreds of people in homes and businesses may need to begin relocating if officials decide a sizable part of the structures near mountains are too risky to live in after the avalanche.

1. The avalanche
2. Store Norske crisis worsens, nearly everything to shut down next summer
3. Total solar eclipse totally lives up to years of absurd hype
4. Scientists spend six months studying sea

See TOP, page 26
TOP, from page 25

5. Kamikaze local council election results in largely the status quo
6. Tourism companies report record business as Longyearbyen begins hoping the industry can double in size
7. First polar bear census in 14 years, while incomplete, gives climate skeptics ammo as population booms
8. Dmitry Rogozin’s visit sparks a war of words with Russia and substantial changes in entry laws
9. This year’s top ten climate change stories
10. Svalbard helps Syria from afar with money and historic seed ‘withdrawal’
11. Dog flu epidemic takes massive toll on peak spring visitor season. And yet...
12. First-ever brewery in Longyearbyen opens to intoxicating success

2017
Abandon all hope

We’re not going to spin it: the year known as 2017 was a disaster – literally.

An avalanche early on shook the community and its leaders to its foundations, climate change inflicted maybe its most humiliating impact on us yet, Barentsburg suffered through two fatal crashes and the hope of some kind of future in terms of Store Norske’s coal mines suffered a death far more painful than even the most pessimistic envisioned.

Still, a bad day in Svalbard beats a good day in lots of other places, which is evident in the ever-growing glee at those of others. But all to forgett their misfortunates by indulging in the growing realization our pristine days outside of 2017 are. More than 240 homes and dorms in a town of 2,300 residents being torn down starting immediately. We have two fewer months of winter (and four within some of our lifetimes) as climate change hits three times – not twice, as immediately. We have two fewer months of winter (and four within some of our lifetimes) as climate change hits three times – not twice, as long thought – as fast as the rest of Earth.

It's not just the numbers that are staggering. It's that there are so many affecting virtually every aspect of life here.

“Mixed” was the most common “word of the year” to describe global happenings in 2018 due to an insufferable amount of noxious politics, conflicts, natural calamities of unprecedented scale, societal hatred of “others” and so much more. But while Svalbard managed to largely escape those miseries, the word seemed even more literally appropriate here due to the immense amount of harmful substances created by literal mass teardowns of life-sustaining foundations, the lethal threat of migrating elements on long-existing human and wildlife, and the growing realization our pristine days outside the smog of society’s misdeeds are short if not already over.

Some changes such as the home and mine demolitions are causing immediate and long-term pain, while others such as a polar bear killed by cruise ship crew will be remembered much more. But while Svalbard managed to largely escape those miseries, the word seemed even more literally appropriate here due to the immense amount of harmful substances created by literal mass teardowns of life-sustaining foundations, the lethal threat of migrating elements on long-existing human and wildlife, and the growing realization our pristine days outside the smog of society’s misdeeds are short if not already over.

TOXIC SHOCK: Demolition of 240 residents and Svalbard’s last major coal mines top year of harmful climate in many forms reaching new heights

Forty percent of local workers were coal miners a decade ago, now maybe five percent are. More than 240 homes and dorms in a town of 2,300 residents being torn down starting immediately. We have two fewer months of winter (and four within some of our lifetimes) as climate change hits three times – not twice, as long thought – as fast as the rest of Earth.

It’s not just the numbers that are staggering. It's that there are so many affecting virtually every aspect of life here.

Abandon all hope

Abandon all hope

Abandon all hope

Abandon all hope
Extra-extra-extra absurd 10-year anniversary issue

The ways we were weird

• Bear of a Film: A polar bear rattle the cage of a documentary narrator became a viral internet hit at the beginning of the year and set off a controversy for a local filmmaker…
• This festival is da bomb: Inaugural film festival struggled to top 20 viewers at most screenings – and most of them were journalists and festival officials…
• Chief convict: Former Store Norske leader said prison brutality surprising because he expected "a sort of school camp, where I could go home and pick up a book if I wanted…”
• Veggug at the Top of the World:
• Not the Northemost: Hammerfest continues a long feud with Honningsvåg about which is the "world's northernmost city…”
• Viral vacancy: A help-wanted ad from the governor seeking a summer polar bear guard attracted about 300 thrillseekers…
• Russian Rainbows: Barentsburg visitors were greeted with rainbow flags and other paraphernalia in August in protest of Russia's new law criminalizing homosexual propaganda…
• Predator Plant: As if Svalbard didn't have enough fearsome creatures, we now have flesh-eating plants to deal with…
• Bogus Bigfoot: A geneticist claimed a "100 percent match" between the yeti (a.k.a. Abominable Snowman) of the Himalayas and Svalbard's polar bears are linked has been exhaustively and repeatedly found by experts to be full of crap…
• Corrupt ex leader Robert Hermansen the big winner in Store Norske crisis: He got a hero's welcome home after 15 months in prison…
• The Return of the Yeti – twice: The guy who says he has DNA samples proving Bigfoot exists was full of crap and Svalbard's polar bears are linked…
• Hut made of garbage gets trashed, junked and (finally?) recycled: Trash/treasure cliches ran amok in August after artist Solveig Egeland and a group of volunteers built a beachside hut made of debris collecting during the governor's annual cleanup cruise…
• Two guys in polar bear costumes scare reindeer, win major science award: Sharing the awards stage with someone who's project is "stopping nosebleeds with pork" doesn't suggest your research is going to get a lot of respect…
• The Return of the Yeti – twice: The guy who says he has DNA samples proving Bigfoot exists was full of crap and Svalbard's polar bears are linked…
• Cruise passengers take the piss: The bizarre behavior of the hoards invading by the thousands some days finally boiled over as…
• Hut made of garbage gets trashed, junked and recycled: Trash/treasure cliches ran amok in August after artist Solveig Egeland and a group of volunteers built a beachside hut made of debris collecting during the governor's annual cleanup cruise…
• Two guys in polar bear costumes scare reindeer, win major science award: "stopping nosebleeds with pork" doesn't suggest your research is going to get a lot of respect…

2014

BLAZING SADDOS: Drunk pyromaniacs, pervy tourists, trashy environmentalists and cherished cons add to woeful year

2015

CHILLINGLY CLUELESS: After watching 'Fortitude' is it any wonder 'Sval and Bard' are among this year's biggest bumbling?
All we know is both versions of Svalbard will be back – and probably even stranger – next year.

This year's strangeness was obviously no laughing matter much of the time thanks to the deepening of the coal mining crisis that may result in a quarter of our residents departing by next summer. But since such somber happenings will obviously be part of the "10 biggest stories" list in the final issue of the year, here – in roughly chronological order – is our annual "Svalbard's 10 strangest stories" that mostly offer a much lighter look at the archipelago during these dark times:

- 'Fortitude' proves bugs are more deadly than polar bears and Doomsday Vault zombies: Just seeing trees and the police hand their rifle to clueless hikers in the opening episode made us wonder if the producers did most of their research at Karlsberger Pub…
- Future imperfect: A robot riding the rails in a personless Pyramiden: Then there's the version of Svalbard where Pyramiden is occupied by a lone inhabitant: a robot on a roller coaster 24/7/365…
- 'Blackout dates' get new meaning with the rush for rooms during the eclipse: All of the major hotels sold out years in advance and major tour companies arranged for blocks of large tent spaces well beforehand, leaving indie travelers at the mercy of locals renting their apartments, cabins and rooms…
- Svalbard takes lead in calling for climate change action – by others: Our local priest is no longer a centrist little girl was obliterated by a weapon. When it came to the ways we were weird, 2016 made Svalbard great again. Bigly. Forget the weather that was off-the-charts whacky. The bewilderling shift in businesses. The trippy TV "docu-soap." And the fact lots of locals were forced to undergo three enemas (or, as the mainstream media put it, "they were evacuated") within a year.
- All that surreality and more that also happens to be a substantial significance will be brought up when Icepeople's "10 Biggest Stories of 2016" is published next week. This list is all about weirdness for weirdness' sake in the many ways only possible where man, giant mutant polar bears and cleverly hidden 300-meter-high trees co-exist.
- So, in no particular order because that would require extra effort, here are Icepeople's 10 strangest stories for 2016:
  - The truly tragic election in the UK: Boaty McBoatface: "What You Get When You Let The Internet Decide," a headline in The New York Times bemoaned. Um, yeah, because if we learned any-thing about elections in 2016, the results are much more rational if people vote in person…
  - A bunch of terrified U.S. residents discover Svalbard's 'open borders': Canada's immigration website broke the internet the day after Wiggins Donald won the U.S. presidential election: Spooked-out snowflakes discovered moving north of the border wasn't as easy as they hoped, but fortunately hundreds of articles shoed Svalbard has by far the easiest residency requirements…
  - Russia leaves Norway with a bear of a counting problem: The first full census of the area's polar bears in 14 years was mixed when Russians – for reasons never made all that clear – decided at the last minute not to authorize the long-planned count on its side of the border…
  - 'Rod Stewart' becomes a celebrity cabbie: Kudos to The Local Paper of Race baiting for sparking a debate with few grey area by noting three locations in the southern part of the archipelago have names starting with the Norwegian equivalent of "negro" (or the even more pejorative "n" word, according to some)…
  - Video games, government play around with Doomsday Vault in Svalbard: It's always a good time for a nuclear holocaust in Svalbard and that was the case again in 2016 in a big way…
  - Local vigilante militia goes on a real-life hunt for alien invaders: While "mainstream" publications were mentioning problems with a viral phone game with the initials "PG" such as hunters going into high crime areas and cemeteries, catching critters in Svalbard means unique problems ranging from wandering into the zone where a bunch of homes were destroyed by an avalanche to glacier crevasses…
  - Svalbard tops 'city of brotherly love' by not just booping, but exiling Santa: First the bureaucrats declared his workshop a condemned area. Then they decided he was a deplorable for having a mailbox. Anybody who's lived here anytime amount of time knows Santa's real workshop in the allegedly abandoned Mine 2B, but Store Norske declared earlier this year the place was condemned due to rot damage…
  - Aquaman's only chance for survival is climbing to high hills of Svalbard? Look, we get climate change is screwing everything up, but this might be the black-is-white story of the year. Aquaman has to reach the snowline here to survive since he's a completely clueless idiot who obviously can't see there's no ice in the sea for the first time in living memory…
  - Best reality show of year: Blonde busts out in 'Stranded in Svalbard': Space is short, but luckily the written word is a poor way to expose people to Viky Viktoria's adventures and misadventures after her husband strands her here…

Extra-extra-absurd 10-year anniversary issue
activities are supposedly taboo…

- Giant Santa’s mailbox comes down just before Christmas because…’tis the season: That nearly 10-meter-high Santa’s mailbox outside a simple building near downtown is gone and a lot of tourists – if not locals – will be asking why…

- Svalbarði ‘scandal’ – bottled glacial water pulled off Hong Kong store due to outrage about high price: A flood of media coverage went from cool to chilly in September in Hong Kong when the water selling for HK$950 per 750ml bottle was pulled from the shelves of a high-end grocery store due to “an icy reaction online” with “the scandal reaching boiling point…”

- ‘I send an envelope of semen to the World Seed Bank every few months, but they won’t confirm that they’ve received it’: Thanks to Thomas Moretti’s for saving us the trouble of writing a catchy introduction for his titillating quest…

2018

Russians linked to polar bear porn video connected to Trump meltdown as Norway’s royal family gets trashed

Pretty much all of the news in Svalbard is strange compared to anywhere else.

Which means perhaps the strangest thing about this rant that’s our favorite annual year-end feature (voted “The Best Media Listicle on Earth” seven straight years*) is the truly strangest story of 2018 isn’t actually on the list (along with probably the silver and bronze winners, plus a couple others in the top ten).

While the whole world made fun of us for our first-ever (bungled) bank robbery, the utter failure of “the ultimate doomsday vault” to survive a few rainstorms and being polar bear pimps for (wannabe) rich tourists, none of those are in the list below. As always, it’s because they’re already on the more journalistically substantive “Svalbard’s 10 Biggest Stories of 2018” – meaning they’re being published for substantially more than polar porn’s sake.

But speaking of sex, be prepared for a stimulating threesome of that many more titillating tales as Icepeople presents, in no particular order, the never-to-be-questioned-for-all-eternity “Svalbard’s 10 Strangest Stories of 2018.”

(*Prove we’re wrong by finding someone else who’s won the award.)*

- Polar bear sexcapades arouse humans’ lust for dirty images and dirty deeds: Shocking revelation: there are hundreds of polar bears waddling around Svalbard TOTALY NAKED engaging in UNPROTECTED PREMARITAL SEX in wide-open public spaces!!!

- Polar bear ransacks food storage room at Isfjord Radio: Sex safely sells (as opposed to selling safe sex), but last year’s premier polar bear payoff involved another craving of the senses as the King of the Arctic turned into a common petty thief and broke into the storage room where food is kept at Isfjord Radio…

- Mount Trumpmore – Giant ice sculpture of The Donald to be a monumental meltdown: The Very Stable Genius has decreed his backpack feignedgesh desires to be on Mount Rushmore along with the Fab Four, which has inspired some greenies wanting to offer a warming tribute before such feelings are set in stone…

- Silence of the quails – Greenhouse owner forced to kill dozens of illegally hatched birds: Strangest doesn’t always mean funniest and, during a year full of misfortunes affecting humans, this had to be Longyearbyen’s saddest animal story of the year (not necessary Svalbard’s due to misadventures involving polar bears, reindeer, foxes and other species…)

- Migrants make multiple ministers involved in Svalbard oversight muck things up: Replacing the “ruler” of Svalbard’s three times in three weeks while Norway’s government testers on the brink of collapse seems an obvious pick for the “10 biggest stories” list – if only those bosses said or did anything of actual significance instead of merely being a part of the political clown car…

- Fictional fiasco ‘Fortitude’ finally finds Svalbard, but final season is a four-episode flop: “It all went wrong for Fortitude, I reckon, somewhere in that first pitch meeting.” That opening line for a review by The Times of London a TV series about a Svalbard Community That Totally Isn’t Longyearbyen is the best succinct summary we’ve seen. Everything about the sci-fi psychological thriller was insanely wrong from the opening scene…

- Drunk idiot blacklisted from all places with booze: If you can be officially exiled from Svalbard for raising hell with alcohol (i.e. trying to burn down an apartment building while drunk), consider this the unofficial policy of persona non grata for raising heck…

- Entire Norwegian royal family takes amazingly invisible summer vacation here, greeted by governor with gift of trash bags: Far from having to play paparazzi when rumors of the Norwegian royal family visiting Svalbard this summer arose, perhaps the strangest thing that could have happened was we and the rest of the press pack…basically did nothing…

- The Russians are invading! The Russians are invading! The Russians are…oh for Puck’s sake – are they here yet?: Lots of places are irrationally enshrined in their own Russian Scandal from serious (poisoning spies) to silly (pee tape), and Svalbard is in the midst of a long-running sideshow on that front…

- Failed four-approach flight leaves passengers and pros loopy: In a weird departure from our supposedly independent media minds, we’re going with what took the silver medal in Svalbardposten’s most-read list (hey, always nice to know what normal residents who have a clue find freakish compared to what freakish residents like ourselves find normal)…
I'm paying you 50 kroner to read this newspaper

(perhaps my ego is big, but not that big)

I really need to update this pathetic plea, but it'll stay in this memorial issue for the sake of nostalgia (and laziness)

Does this look like a guy with money to burn?

I've done this for nearly 20 years as a labor of love for Svalbard. But the growing size of this fishwrapper (each photocopied sheet of paper costs five kroner) and the growing readership simply means I'm going bankrupt faster. Help me to keep my shabby shirt on my back (you really don't want to see me without it) by donating to our tip jar or making a one-time donation of any amount at icepeople.net.

And if you're feeling less than charitable, I'm even willing to do honest work:

The Mac Hack

We impishly dissect, gleefully crush and sadistically drown Macintoshes. But since not many people are willing to pay for that, we also repair, upgrade, disinfect Macs, and offer spare cables, batteries and other parts – cheap!

Got a truly dead machine? Let us have "fun" with it!
(Seriously, the parts can help others and keep our prices low.)

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Incompetent in "cod Norwegian"

Insanely competent in English

Translation, editing and design of:
Reports, theses, CVs, brochures websites, ads and whatever

(Do I really have to put my contact details here again?)
By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

The way people are gawking and taking photos at the stubby green contraption moseying its way up and down the center of Longyearbyen you’d think they’ve never seen a shuttle bus before. And they haven’t – at least not one where the “driver” is navigating it by programming its route into a computer while sitting on the rear bench.

The bus that arrived last Friday is getting a test drive as the first-ever autonomous vehicle in the Arctic, according to its driver/programmer and some of the numerous sponsor decals across its exterior. On Tuesday morning it was parked or moving slowly along the main pedestrian walkway through the town center where, for once, the miner’s statute nearby was of secondary attraction to passers-by.

“We’re doing this to see if we can do a pilot project here in Svalbard,” said Jonny Haugen, project and development engineer for Applied Autonomy, the company responsible for the vehicle. “I believe it’s because it’s new technology, it’s green and it’s an electronic vehicle.”

A public presentation and rides along the walkway with Sparebank1 as the boarding point are scheduled from 12:30 to 6 p.m. Thursday.

While eye-catching, autonomous shouldn’t be confused with smart or particularly well-suited for Arctic conditions.

“The bus will only go where it’s programmed to,” Haugen said. “It’s almost like a tram line on wheels.”

He said the programming process includes driving the shuttle up and down the walkway “so it makes a map of the route.” The vehicle uses GPS and other technology to plot the data.

The bus has a maximum designated capacity of 12 people, half of whom can sit on front and rear benches, two on “stand-up seats” along the center walls and four standing up.

A possible test route if the pilot project is approved is between Svalbard Airport and the Svalbard Global Seed Vault, Haugen said. Some other seemingly obvious possible routes, such as between the airport and the center of town, aren’t an ideal fit.

“This is made for trips of less than three to five kilometers because the maximum speed of it is 40 kilometers an hour,” he said.

Among the advantages of using the airport as a hub is it has free electronic vehicle charging ports installed when the facility obtained solar panels and its own electronic vehicles for use a couple of years ago.

The shuttle bus has four relatively small wheels for its size and the length of the body is perhaps 25 centimeters above the street surface, so don’t look for it on days like Monday when a blizzard brought heavy snow and strong winds to the area.

“At the moment it probably can’t drive in those kind of snow conditions,” Haugen said, noting efforts are underway to make the shuttle more suitable for poor weather conditions.

The company has another shuttle in operation in Kongsberg between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. daily, Haugen said. Similar vehicles are also in use throughout parts of Europe, Singapore, the United States and elsewhere.

There’s more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.
The Longyearbyen branch of Sparebank1 is closed following a robbery by a man with a rifle who escaped with 70,000 kroner on the morning of Dec. 28.

Charges against suspect in Longyearbyen’s first bank heist include threats and force, but not robbery

By MARK SABBATINI

A 29-year-old Russian man accused of Longyearbyen’s first-ever bank robbery by demanding money at gunpoint was formally charged this week, with his attorney stating his client was actually seeking attention and help for his psychological problems in the short-lived caper.

The defendant briefly escaped with 70,000 kroner from the robbery at the Sparebank1 branch during the morning of Dec. 21. He has been described as apologetic while demanding 100,000 kroner while pointing a rifle at the bank’s three employees.

“This is not a joke,” he said, according to Nordlys. “This is a robbery.”

But he is not facing formal robbery charges, as Nord-Troms District Court prosecutors in Nord are seeking convictions on counts of making threats, coercive force and carrying a firearm illegally, with an emphasis placed on the fact the action occurred unprovoked.

“That is because he has explained that this was not a real robbery,” Ulf Hansen, the defendant’s attorney, told TV2. “He was not looking for money at all, but attention. And he got it.”

A trial expected to last two days is scheduled in May, but Hansen told TV2 his client acknowledges what he has done and is going to plead guilty to the charges. He is pleased that the charge for robbery is not included in the charges.

Prosecutors and bank employees declined to comment to the media about the case.

The man escaped with 70,000 kroner, but was caught about 20 minutes later. But fears about his being at-large with a weapon prompted officials to quickly recall students back to Longyearbyen School just as they were being let out after an abbreviated day before the winter holiday break.

News of the robbery made global headlines, both for its first-ever designation in the world’s northernmost town (where seriously crimes have historically been nearly non-existent) and because of the near-impossibility of escaping due to the lack of any escape possibility from Longyearbyen other than one to two daily commercial flights.

“It must simply have been an idiot, based on the misunderstanding that it is possible to leave the island on your own…or insanity…or maybe a combination of both,” was a typical reaction of online commenters. But some locals objected to the flood of humorous comments, noting the stress the bank employees and people in town aware the suspect was at-large suffered.

There’s more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.
Chili feast

Scorching music video, cable car craft, a 150 percent effort and yet another circus hot at local UKM

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

Most small town parents probably wouldn’t be thrilled spending a Friday night being confronted with their son hijacking the pulpit of the local church followed by an escort to the back of a police car, much less seeing it broadcast far and wide. Then again, they could have been the ones watching their kids take a high fall without a net or trying to show it’s actually possible to give a 150 percent effort.

They weren’t scenes of teen angst, but rather Longyearbyen’s version of Friday Night Lights as about 60 students participated in the local stage of the annual UKM talent competition in front of a packed crowd of peers and parents at Kulturhuset. The mixture of music, videos, interviews and oddball art, interviews and eccentric emcees might have been any local youth talent show anywhere – except for the inevitable presence of polar bears, glaciers and other Svalbardesque hallmarks.

Six of the 16 performances and art exhibits were selected by judges to advance to the regional UKM stage in Tromsø in April. The top attendees there will participate in the national competition in Trondheim in June.

Among the locals advancing this year is Sirkus Svalnardo, the acrobatic youth troupe that regularly makes it the regional stage and advanced to the national event last year. The members of this year’s troupe are Liv-Anna Ringheim, 17, Niva Stiberg-Hansen, 16, Pia Bronken Eidesen, 15, Sigri Klausen Markussen, 16, Sofie Marlen Solberg, 16, and Vilde Olsbakk Ronning, 16.

“The panel feels the performance was well composed and that it was a sunny, in-sync performance...good song selection...engages and contributes new ideas...they are clever, kind and represent the youth of Svalbard in a good way,” the judges’ summary states.
Six of 16 local acts go to UKM regionals

Perhaps not such a “good” role model, but still advancing were the five teens who created the rap music video “Chilli in my Eyes” which (big surprise) has something to do with the adverse relationship between eyeballs and Scoville Heat Units. So despite the icy surroundings the main man with the mic is definitely not feeling chill in the flat with his mate, in the pulpit, the police seat or where impressionable tykes gather at the local kindergarten. Producing the video were Jonatan Johansen (editor), 16, Jørgen Andreas Sæter, 15 (actor/rapper), Kristian Seljevold (actor/rapper), 15, Martin Higraff, 16, manager, and Tobias Fjerdingoy (producer/actor), 15.

“Original and creative,” the judges wrote. “Played on local humor and it struck. Well made, well performed and fun with Spanish!”

Other stage performances advancing were:
• The five-member rock group Hundred and Fifty Percent performing their original song “What You Know” (“lots of contact with the audience…good mood…good variety within the song…lots of life…can work to become a little more precise,” according to the judges). The band’s members, all age 16, are Johansen, Stiberg-Hansen, Peder Jenssen, Ronja Hermanesen and Tobias Klungseth Rotevatn.
• Stiberg-Hansen (piano) and Sigri Klaussen (vocals), 16, for a music/slideshow presentation of “Vi Lovar” (“the featured scenery was simply amazing…beautifully conveyed, incredibly original with pictures in the background, good timing and lovely accompaniment,” the judges wrote).

Those with photography/art works advancing were:
• Jarun Bjørndal, 13, with a cultural heritage collage (“this artwork is a picture that becomes more exciting the more you see it. Provides room for personal interpretation. As we interpret it, it testifies to the maturity of a young artist. Simple and clean composition. The composition of a naiveist cable car and the indirect message in the newspaper articles was exciting”).
• Vilde Storø, 19, and Agnes Zadewasser, 13, with their collage “Cutouts in Paradise” (“Great variations of art techniques. Good color combinations. Provides room for interpretation. Positive that you see there are different age groups that have made the picture”).

There’s more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.
Locals interested in volunteering to staff a new ski hill in the center of Longyearbyen catch a rope tow for the walk to the top of the 150-meter slope.

Bright lights for new ski hill as onlookers, volunteer operators and youths embrace the down side of life

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

Emil Indreiten Johansen, 10, was the first to arrive with a friend, but still found himself enduring a lengthy wait to catch the pole lift at Longyearbyen’s new ski hill, since the cluster of oh-so-nearly trained adults to operate it were still at the top of the slope getting final pointers.

But after a three-year wait since the closure of the lift at a hill two kilometers from the one now in the center of town, he didn’t mind the delay – especially since he prefers it to the old one.

"I like it better because it’s wider and it’s a better slope," he said.

The new hill on Sukkertoppen – which in a bit of a paradox is adjacent to where the tragic avalanche of 2015 occurred – attracted considerable attention and interest from locals and visitors alike when it debuted last month. The central locale and bright lights make it an automatic draw for the eye during nighttime – and visitors who might think Longyearbyen is a ski town (and locals hoping it may be one day) may get their wish with a much longer lift soon.

For now the new 150-meter ski slope is 30...
Local youths take to Longyearbyen's new ski hill earlier this month for an annual day of snow activities. It is the first time in three years the event was ski-oriented due to the closure of the old ski hill next to Longyearbyen School because of the concerns about the instability of old mining trusses there.

Small ski hill may be start of bigger slope

DOWNHILL, from page 35

meters shorter than the previous one adjacent to Longyearbyen School, said Patrick Bossart, a city recreation employee supervising the new facility. But he said overall it's better for skiing.

"First of all it's much better snow conditions up there and the surface is shaped so the wind sweeps (above) it," he said.

The lift can accommodate seven people at a time on the lift, which takes about one minute to reach the top. Bossart said reaction since the lift opened in February has been highly positive.

"They like that first of all it's very central and well illuminated by the new lights," he said.

Lift capacity places a practical limit on how many people are on the hill at a time, with Bossart estimating about 30 so far has been the maximum.

"I think there is a lot of space for 30 people," he said.

Bossart said the most common skiers he's seeing so far are "those small kids who are not old enough to ride scooters, but still need to be outside." But "you also see kids 15, 16, 17 and we had a student from UNIS that wanted to try it."

The lift can only operate when Bossart or qualified volunteers sign up to staff it during evenings and weekends, so he hosted a 90-minute session earlier this month that attracted about 10 people. While the basics are simple – a few switches and pressing a button on a control panel in a warming hut at the base of the hill – knowing how to quickly use one of several emergency stops and respond properly if a mishap such as an injury occurs is vital.

Most of those who signed up for the session didn't have any previous lift operator experience, but had little trouble figuring things out.

"My kids are skiing here," said Hege Leithe, a local resident for 12 years whose children are ages six and nine. "They love it."

Nils Aleksandar Gajie, who describes himself as a "frequent visitor" now working at a local kindergarten, said he doesn't have kids, but the prospect of volunteering is enticing.

"It will be totally useful to operate the life for the town for anyone who wants it," he said.

Are any of the many visitors seen watching the hill – especially during the evenings – from the walkway along the center of town inquiring about lift tickets?

"We have had a few questions about that, but this is free," he said.

While the idea of taking a short powder on the hill might be little more than a lark now for tourists and many grown-ups, Bossart said the new hill is hopefully just an appetizer for a far more ambitious lift of 400 meters or more he hopes is operating on the mountain within two to three years.

This is just temporary," he said. "We are aiming for a bigger ski life – a real one with chairs – up much higher, up at least until where the rocks are," he said.

There's more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.
Atlantification of the marine ecosystem in Kongsfjord

Phytoplankton investigations in Kongsfjorden date back to the early 1970s with systematic monitoring each summer since 2009. The time series indicates three different spring bloom scenarios. Until the early 2000s, Kongsfjorden often had a long-lasting ice cover, and the phytoplankton bloom was in May. The recent decrease in sea ice cover has resulted in an earlier bloom in April. Both these bloom scenarios are characterised by the dominance of diatoms due to weak thermal gradients allowing resting spores to be mixed up into the water column during winter. The last scenario, encountered during the warmest years in the time series, is associated with a surface inflow of Atlantic Water during winter, preventing deep winter mixing and ice formation. This scenario results in a delayed and diminished bloom dominated by colonies of Phaeocystis pouchetti. Such changes in the timing, magnitude, and composition of the spring bloom can have ripple effects on the entire marine food web. (Read full report at tinyurl.com/y36cvrv3)

– Fram Forum

Gear from massive meteorite haul getting Svalbard test

The first British-led expedition to gather meteorites in the Antarctic has returned with a haul of 36 space rocks using a new metal detector with sub-surface ice capabilities. “What we have done is design a wide-array metal detector,” said Geoff Evatt a Manchester University mathematician participating the expedition. “It’s essentially a five-meter-wide series of panels that we can drag behind the skidoo. In real-time, we’re able to sense what’s going on underneath the surface of the ice. And if an iron object passes under the panels then some lights and some audio equipment flashes up on the skidoo and we can then go out and hopefully retrieve the meteorite that’s within the ice.” The project was a trial ahead of another deployment in the next field season that will try to target specific types of objects that seem systematically to be underrepresented in Antarctic finds – thus making them undetected and “missing” from previous collection efforts. The research team is planning a final test of the detection equipment in Svalbard next month.

– Hanahan Herald

Climate change rapidly shakes up Svalbard’s food chain

Seals and whales in the Arctic are shifting their feeding patterns as climate change alters their habitats, and the way they do so may determine whether they survive, a new study has found. Researchers harnessed data sets span...
ning two decades to examine how two species of Arctic wildlife — beluga whales, also known as white whales, and ringed seals — are adapting to their changing habitat. The research focused on the area around Svalbard — northwest of Norway — which is experiencing rapid impacts from climate change and particularly a "large collapse in sea-ice conditions in 2006 that has continued to the present day," said lead researcher Charmain Hamilton. "Both white whales and ringed seals were tagged in Svalbard before this collapse occurred to study their basic ecology. Repeat sampling after the sea-ice collapse occurred thus offered the opportunity for a natural experiment," added Hamilton, who works with the Norwegian Polar Institute. Both species traditionally hunt for food in areas with sea ice and particularly at so-called tidal glacier fronts, where glaciers meet the ocean. Both species traditionally hunt for food in areas with sea ice and particularly at so-called tidal glacier fronts, where glaciers meet the ocean.

– Agence France-Presse
Research-based education of the next generation of Arctic experts

The University Centre in Svalbard

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A maintenance worker updates a shop owner about a water leak from a cracked water pipe on the second floor of Lompensenteret that forced the shopping center to close most of its space Tuesday.

‘Like Niagara Falls’

Flooding from leaky ceiling pipe forces closure of Lompensenteret

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

Heavy water leakage from a cracked water pipe in the ceiling that both flooded and apparently damaged the electrical system of Lompensenteret forced the closure of most of shopping center mid-morning Tuesday. The mall was throughout the day.

Espen Klungseth Rotevatn, principal of Svalbard Folkehøgskole, said he was sitting in his office on the second floor at about 10:30 a.m. when he heard water splashing in the hallway.

“It was like someone was taking a shower outside our office,” he said.

The water only seeped into his office and didn’t cause any apparent damage, but tenants and workers involved in a large-scale renovation of the shopping center worked feverishly on both floors to mop up the flooding.

“It was like Niagara Falls gushing,” one shop owner said.

The leakage occurred for several minutes before it was shut off and most of the spillage was cleaned up by 11:30 a.m. Strugstad Sport1 suffered the heaviest damage in terms of its space and merchandise, according to Svalbard-posten.

Fruene, the MIX kiosk, Karlsberger Pub and Stationen remained open with water available throughout the day, and the pharmacy provided medications to those needing them on an emergency basis.

The mall has been undergoing extensive renovations since last year.

There’s more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.

What's online

Icepeople.net provides daily updates of news about Svalbard and the world’s polar regions, plus extras for articles from the print edition. Among the latest news:

- UN: Arctic ‘locked-in’ for 3-5C temp. rise
- Geoengineering to fight climate change?
- Rain melts Greenland ice sheet in winter
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