



## 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



Nicholas Øverli's sun drawing is being featured at this year's festival.

weeklong series of concerts, theater performances, historical presentations, sledging 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 -5C 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.

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Visitors gather outside the Svalbard Global Seed Vault for a tour on Feb. 26, the facility's one-year anniversary. The vault received 90,000 seeds weighing four tons for the occasion.

## 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

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### 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.

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HEADLINES STOLEN FROM  
**SVALBARDPOSTEN**  
VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

- Helicopter issue on trial Monday
- Bear shows no fear in Barentsburg
- Soon the empty signal for pens

English translations of these and other pillaged articles (OK, we owe them many thanks for allowing this) are at [www.icepeople.net](http://www.icepeople.net).

## 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 failing 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."



Ideally, the last time I'll be on the front page.

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## Who's to blame and how to express your wrath

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## Copyright stuff

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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 and other reasons, but we will also make every reasonable effort to contact the author about any changes prior to publication.

# 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 as obvious or stuff already published.

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 (marksabbatini@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 traveling 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 neurotic behavior," 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, burrowed 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 2C to 3.5C (3.6F to 6.3F) 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 .85C (1.5F) 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 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



A cameraman films storage shelves of the Svalbard Global Seed Vault during the first anniversary celebration of the facility Feb. 26. The vault can store more than 2 billion seeds.

## Really, really against the seed vault

There's plenty of heated debate about climate change topics like genetically modified foods, but at least one author sees Svalbard's doomsday seed vault possibly causing doomsday itself.

F. William Engdahl, author of the book "Seeds Of Destruction," argues in a December 2007 article published by Global Research the Svalbard Global Seed Vault is part of a scheme to give agribusiness control of the world's crops. High-profile advocates of gene banks are involved in a decades-long plan to "turn science to the service of eugenics, a hideous version of racial purity," according to Engdahl.

"Time will tell whether, God Forbid, the Svalbard Doomsday Seed Bank of Bill Gates and the Rockefeller Foundation is part of another Final Solution, this involving the extinction of the Late, Great Planet Earth," he writes.

Reaction to Engdahl's works differs wildly, with some denouncing him as a conspiracy theorist while reviews of "Seeds Of Destruction" posted at Global Research's Web site offer lauds such as "reads like a murder mystery of an incredible dimension."

The article and other writings by Engdahl can be read at [www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=7529](http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=7529).

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 cooling 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](http://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 -4C – the temperature of the outer chamber – felt, as one person said, "like being on the beach" compared to the -18C 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 Emile Frison, 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



Guests, above, carry some of the 90,000 seeds deposited by nations and organizations from the entrance of the Svalbard Global Seed Vault to a holding area about 130 meters into the mountain as part of the facility's one-year anniversary Feb. 26. At right, Sylvi Lundgren, a biology student in Bergen, picks seeds on Svalbard in September 2008 as she and about a dozen others collected about 100 varieties of local seeds to store in the

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 insufficient 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](http://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 bit crazy, this sun, maybe inspired by all the crazy weather."

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

"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 Kinosalen starting at 10 p.m. The Longyearbyen Storband will play standards downstairs, while the Howlin' Huskies and The Twistaroos 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 Pitbullsanatorium at 10 p.m. Wednesday, Eastern-tinged Norsk-pop group Real Ones at 10 p.m. Thursday and local rock band Schmeerenburgh 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](http://www.solfest.no). An English translation of the page is available at [www.icepeople.net](http://www.icepeople.net).