



Change: Not just a motto

Rebounding Russian settlements, more diverse Norwegian ones altering role of governor's office

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

It's a bit like a town council crossed with the United Nations, where authorities offer a helping hand to their neighbor while smacking them upside the head.

Overseeing a rebounding and rebellious Russian community, advances and mishaps in safety, and breakthroughs and disasters in environmental protection are among the highlights of the Svalbard governor's annual report for the past year. While never a typical bureaucrat's day at the office, markedly different changes in different settlements are redefining what those duties are.

"We have seen a marked increase in Russian activity on Svalbard – especially the last two years," the report notes. "This development has led to the governor's responsibilities becoming increased broad in scope and complexity."

The population of Barentsburg increased from 380 in 2011 to 471 in 2012, resumed mining operations produced 120,000 tons of coal and the Russians envision becoming "a tourist operator/travel agent on a par with tourism operators in Longyearbyen." But praise for soil cleanup projects and modernization of their power plant

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MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE



20TH CENTURY FOX TELEVISION

Cary Fowler, above, shows boxes of seeds from Syria to a visitor inside the Svalbard Global Seed Vault early in 2012. At left, a guard and a pair of barking snakes stand watch at the vault's entrance in the 2010 television show "The Futurama Holiday Spectacular." The real vault doesn't have a guard or snakes.

Doom and bloom

Svalbard seed vault celebrates five years as real, fantasy icon

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

A nation's crops saved just before a critical site is destroyed by war. A lawsuit by farmers claiming they're hostages of a greedy multinational's GMO scheme. A dream of trig-

gering armageddon and becoming the ruler of an icy Thunderdome.

Such are the headlines as the Svalbard Global Seed Vault approaches its fifth birthday. It now houses about 750,000 seed

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Bydrift: New playground = repairs

Questions raised as 1M kroner meant for new housing spent on 'maintenance' at kindergarten

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

A decision to spend a million kroner of new housing funds for playground equipment at Kullungen kindergarten is raising questions among some Longyearbyen leaders wondering why they weren't consulted about the switch.

New and upgraded housing is among the city's top needs, but Bydrift spent one million

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MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Ero Stiberg Hansen, 4, plays on the new climbing tower at Kullungen kindergarten last October.

Who's to blame and how to express your wrath

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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.

Trying to avoid a train wreck



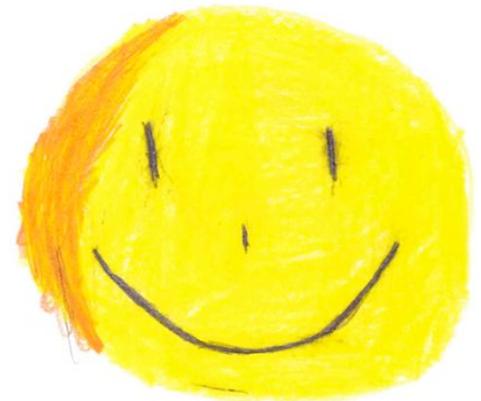
JÜRIG ALEAN / SWISSEDU.CH

A steam locomotive once used for mining stands idle in Ny-Ålesund, where it is a landmark attraction tourists after coal operations were halted in the community 50 years ago. The locomotive is rusting and in danger of falling apart due to its close location to the sea, prompting the Svalbard Environmental Protection Fund to support restoration and/or relocation efforts, according to NRK. Among the proposed options are moving the locomotive farther from the bay, high-pressure washing to remove rust and sending the locomotive to the mainland for restoration. The restoration of a locomotive is a costly affair, and it is up to (property owner) Kings Bay to choose what is happening now," Trine Krystad, the fund's secretary, told the network. The environmental fund can contribute to the ongoing process, but we must consider that when they have decided."

Icesheet

Random bits of the week's weirdness:

The sun appeared in Longyearbyen for the first time in nearly four months Friday. At least if you were standing at precisely the right place somewhere technically in the city limits, but in reality someplace nobody really thinks of as town. We didn't bother trying to see the light (cue jokes about our general journalism cluelessness here) since it was mostly cloudy and, more relevantly, **our not-so-esteemed editor was flattened by the flu. That's why we failed to publish an issue last week for the first time in a couple of years**, for which we'd apologize if incapacitating germs were a lifestyle choice. But by way of amends, we offer **this sunny stand-in by Siril Aurora Malmstein, a fifth-grade student at Longyearbyen School who beat out 136 peers in this year's contest to design the logo for the Solfestuka celebration March 3-9.** March 8, by the way, is when people actually in town can see the sun for the first time, skies permitting ... And since we're giving kudos to one Very Special Student, we'll note the children are all above average again at Longyearbyen School, if slightly less so. The annual nationwide ranking of Norwegian schools by mandatory aptitude exam scores finds Longyearbyen well in the upper ranks with an average of 3.9 (out of 5), although that's one-tenth of a percent below the school's usual score ... Finally, while we're highlighting some of the pop culture madness associated with the Doomsday vault in this week's main story, the



LONGYEABYEN LOKALSTYRE

Have nice twilightly day: With the sun mocking us after its alleged sunrise, it's up to young Siril Aurora Malmstein to provide the light.

weekly award for weirdness goes to performer and writer Cynthia Hopkins for her new show, "This Clement World," billed as "a singing sermon preaching the evils of global warming." Inspired by a climate change awareness cruise around Spitsbergen, her production debuted a week ago in New York. "Theatergoers with a taste for the kind of adventurous fare presented at this Brooklyn theater are the kind of people who probably know the exact size of their carbon footprint already and are doing their level best to squeeze into a smaller shoe size, so to speak," a *New York Times* review declares.



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

A group of tourists explores the ruins and renovations in Pyramiden in September of 2012. A strong Russian effort to boost tourism in its settlements is one of the main things changing the role of the Svalbard governor's office, according to its report for the past year.

Governor leading by following

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was tempered by criticism of illegal construction of a satellite facility, an incomplete waste management plan and hazardous work conditions resulting in at least one serious injury to a miner.

In a similar vein, the governor's duties are evolving in Longyearbyen as it continues becoming into the more diverse and family-oriented community envisioned by Norwegian politicians. An overhaul of environmental regulations in East Svalbard to account for various competing interests nearing completion and overseeing new projects from a mine at Lunckefjell to a

geodesy antenna in Ny-Ålesund were among major developments cited.

But worker safety was also a concern at Store Norske's Svea mine, where there were several accidents including one resulting in a man's arm being amputated. Also, the company was responsible for "the largest oil spill in recent times on Svalbard, where more than 100,000 liters of diesel oil flowed out of the ground under Isfjord Radio and partly into the sea." Store Norske was fined four million kroner for the incident.

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

New playground not fun for some pols

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kroner less than budgeted in 2012, according to the infrastructure agency's just-published annual report. But Bydrift spent 1.2 million kroner on a climbing tower and barbecue at the kindergarten, even though it wasn't specified in the budget approved by the municipal council for that year.

Marianne Aasen, the agency's administrative director, justified the project in a board meeting Thursday by classifying it as maintenance, which doesn't require the approval of

council members.

"When playground equipment is worn out, we tear the old ones out and build new ones," she said, according to *Svalbardposten*.

Criticism of the decision came from Heinrich Eggenfellner, chairman of Bydrift's board, who said the project is an example of how the city's governing structure deprives politicians of authority. A recent report commissioned by the council recommends expanding their control.

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

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM SVALBARDPOSTEN

VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

City: 85 tons of paper not fit for recycling as rules ignored

People are widely discarding the rules of recycling in Longyearbyen by throwing materials other than paper in that designated bin, according to Bydrift officials. As a result the city was forced to send 85 tons of paper for incineration rather than recycling which, among other things, is an extra cost that may get passed on to residents. The problem has existed since a reorganization of the waste treatment facility began in 2006 and officials said better efforts are needed to increase awareness. Certain types of paper such as gift wrap and drink cartons, for instance, should go in the general waste bin. Also, not closing the door on the paper bin exposes it to rain and freezing, making it non-recyclable.

School OKs mainland pupils again, if they make the grade

Longyearbyen School is again accepting a limited number of students from the mainland for one-year enrollments, if they meet high grade and social standards, and are in good physical and mental health. "It turns out that it is necessary," said Ane Fosnes, a counselor at the school. "They're fixing to stay in a bed-sitting room in such a tough environment in Longyearbyen with alcohol and other temptations. We will ensure that functions well with the students we take up." The city halted the program this year for reevaluation, but is accepting up to six second- and third-year high school students for the next academic year. The application deadline is April 15.

Frenchman voted off island due to lack of funds, job

A Frenchman in his 60s was forced by the Svalbard governor's office to leave Longyearbyen on Sunday because he ran out of money. The man came to Longyearbyen hoping to find a job, but was unsuccessful, said Inge Meløy, a first lieutenant for the governor. The governor has the authority to evict people who aren't self-sufficient due to financial, health or other reasons. The Frenchman lacked the funds to pay for plane ticket home, forcing officials to pay the cost, but he will be expected to reimburse the expense.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Snow. E winds to 45 km/h. High -12C (-19C wind chill), low -21C (-27C wind chill).	Cloudy. Variable winds to 32 km/h. High -21C (-28C wind chill), low -23C (-28C wind chill).	Cloudy. E winds to 42 km/h. High -19C (-26C wind chill), low -22C (-29C wind chill).	Partly cloudy. SE winds to 29 km/h. High -20C (-25C wind chill), low -23C (-29C wind chill).
Sunrise 10:00a; sunset 2:24p	Sunrise 9:47a; sunset 2:37p	Sunrise 9:36a; sunset 2:49p	Sunrise 9:24a; sunset 3:00p
Extended forecast: Sunday, cloudy, -20C (-27C), -22C (-27C), light 5:56h; Monday, p. cloudy, -20C (-27C), -21C (-28C), light 6:17h; Tuesday, cloudy, -18C (-28C), -21C (-29C), light 6:36h; Wednesday, snow, -16C (-24C), -18C (-25C), light 6:55h			

Data provided by storm.no



NORDGEN



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE



NORDGEN

An artist's rendering of the Svalbard Global Seed Vault, top, shows the three storage rooms 125 meters inside a mountain, where they are theoretically safe from calamities ranging from rising seas due to climate change to nuclear war. At bottom left, vault employees perform makework duties for film crews touring the vault in 2012 by unloading boxes of seeds in front of a storage room. At bottom right, an artistic lighting installation of reflective stainless steel, mirrors, and prisms along the vault's roof and front panel is the most prominent image of the facility generally seen by the outside world.

At 5, seed vault still a mystery

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species, more than half of Earth's varieties, but its mission of protecting them from global catastrophe is overshadowed in the minds of many who see the vault as a real or fanciful calamity.

Political leaders, vault officials and film crews from several countries are expected to participate in a series of tours and events Feb. 25 and 26 in observance of the occasion.

The facility's debut on Feb. 26, 2008, was the most publicized Svalbard event of the decade due to global fascination with the unique eccentricities of what quickly became known as the "doomsday vault." Buried 125 meters inside a mountain in the mysterious Arctic, it was hailed by supporters as a frozen Garden of Eden that would feed mankind after a nuclear war or massive climate meltdown. There are 1,700 seed banks worldwide, but none combining the size, species variety and safeguards of the Svalbard vault.

In addition to being a location where seeds are assured of staying frozen, the political neutrality of Svalbard has resulted in 53 countries ranging from the United States to North Korea making "deposits." Another country is war-torn Syria, which last year sent thousands of seed varieties just before armed gangs raided an agricultural institution where they had been stored.

"The last little bit left Syria in a truck going over the border to Turkey just before all hell broke loose," said Cary Fowler, executive director of the Global Crop Diversity Trust (GCDT), which helps oversee the vault, in an interview with the *Montreal Gazette*.

While such achievements are among the vault's triumphs for Fowler, he's also faced a wide range of skeptics ranging from serious scientists to fringe conspiracy theorists.

Among the serious concerns are whether seed banks are endangering farmers by advocating concepts such as remote storage and bio-engineering instead of local solutions. Because the GCDT receives substantial funding for vault operations from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and other private entities, there are concerns about potential corporate control of seeds.

A lawsuit being watched closely by GCDT officials pits two U.S. farmers against Monsanto Co. after the corporation filed more than 140 patent infringement suits against 400 farmers nationwide. Farmers say they're being forced to buy new seeds every year because the company won't allow traditional saving and replanting of its bioengineered seeds.

"Farmers, of course, have traditionally felt that harvesting and reuse of seed – which has been going on since Neolithic times – is a natural part of farming, if not a right," Fowler told *The Commercial Appeal* of Memphis. "On the other hand, it is also true that plant breeding is expensive and time consuming, but something we all want and need."

Then there's the fringe and flat-out fantasy element, where corporate involvement is part of a World Domination Scheme and the vault is occupied by everything from zombies to aliens.

Such perceptions have made the vault a hit in movies, video games, books and other pop culture. A classic example is an attempted raid in the cartoon TV show "The Futurama Holiday Spectacular," where "the seeds have been contaminated by a biological weapons repository neighboring the vault, causing pine trees to grow and spread at a rapid rate until they cover the entire Earth."

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

What's up

Feb. 20

6 p.m.: Movie: "Tony 10," Netherlands family film dubbed in Norwegian, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

Feb. 22-23

Salsa class by Tromsø instructor Miguel Ramirez. Three-hour sessions meet at 6 p.m. Feb. 22 and 11 a.m. Feb. 23 at Huset. For information and registration contact boyebe@lokalstyre.no or ir-sando@online.no.

Feb. 23

7 p.m.: Spanish night with concert by vocalist Marthe Bjørkmann and pianist Hedde Berg Hansen. Huset.

Feb. 24

11 a.m.: Mass w/ baptism and communion. Svalbard Church.

11 a.m.: Bolterdalen Rundt, 7K dogsledding/ski race. Details at www.longyearbyenhundeklubb.no.

6 p.m.: Movie: "Karsten og Petra Blir Bestevenner," Norwegian childrens film, all ages. Kulturhuset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Anna Karenina," British drama, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

Feb. 25

1 p.m.: Environmental and Industrial Committee meeting. Næringsbygget 3, Newtontoppen room.

7 p.m.: Trivia quiz. Kulturhuset cafe.

Feb. 26

1 p.m.: Administration Committee meeting. Næringsbygget 3, Newtontoppen room.

Feb. 27

6 p.m.: Movie: "Hansel and Gretel: Witch Hunters" (3D), U.S./German action/adventure, ages 15 and up. Kulturhuset.

March 3

5:30 p.m.: Movie: "Beautiful Creatures," U.S. drama dubbed in Norwegian, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Lincoln," U.S. biography/drama, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

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:

- *Meteorite strike injures 1,000 in Siberia*
- *U.N. warning opposes Arctic oil drilling*
- *Video: Musical instruments of Arctic ice*
- *Iditarod helps find bombs in Afghanistan?*