



Gov.: A lot done, a lot to do

Per Sefland says changes in Svalbard during his four years make job different for successor who's returning to the position

Svalbard Gov. Per Sefland says his successor is returning to a familiar office after four years, but he will find the job has greatly expanded its boundaries.

"Svalbard has really been brought into the center of international polar focus, much more so than four years ago," said Sefland, 60, who is stepping down Sept. 15 after bypassing an optional fifth year in office.

His replacement is Odd Olsen Ingerø, 58, who served as governor from 2001 to 2005. Sefland was appointed to the position in September of 2005 after Sven Ole Fagernæs served briefly as acting governor.

Climate change continues to be a dominant issue, but others affected by warming such as fishing and commercial shipping are gaining international importance, Sefland said. Involvement is also increasing beyond neighbors such as Russia and other Scandinavian countries to places such as Japan, the United States, China, South Korea and India.

Domestic issues are also seeing major changes as coal mining, forecasting a prosperous future four years ago, now faces plummeting prices and demand due to the global recession. Store Norske has already announced a 25 percent reduction of its 400-member workforce and operations in Barentsburg have all but come to a halt due to a 2006 underground fire.

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András Takács, left, is captured on camera by Eszter Cseke at The University Centre In Svalbard after their Sept. 2 interview with United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon as Svalbard Gov. Per Sefland, center, watches. The pair's TV series "On The Spot" is scheduled to begin this fall.

SURREALITY TV

Pair make Svalbard part of Hungarian series on global hot spots

The war in Gaza, the exiled peoples of Tibet, human rights abuses in Cambodia...the ice in Svalbard?

It's a logical part of the group – really – say two Hungarian filmmakers producing a television series about places experiencing globally significant events.

"In our show we have extremely interesting locations, human interest stories and something happening as news," said András Takács, who began working on the series in April with Eszter Cseke. They met as students

three years ago at the Hungarian Film Academy and have been capturing some of the world's more notorious controversies and cultures since.

Svalbard and its role in global efforts to combat climate change will be aired as part of "On The Spot," a series of documentaries scheduled to be broadcast on Hungarian television from November until next July. The Norwegian Arctic, far more remote and free of the military conflicts in many other areas

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Amundsen search comes up empty



Crew aboard the KV Harsta operate the remote controls of a robot searching near Bjørnøya for the plane that vanished with Roald Amundsen.

Members of ocean expedition say they still hope seaplane carrying explorer will be found

A 10-day search failed to find the plane that vanished into the Barents Sea while carrying famed explorer Roald Amundsen to a rescue effort in Svalbard. But participants said they hope progress has been made that will allow the mystery to eventually be solved.

Two ships began searching an area about
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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.



Svalbard Gov. Per Sefland discusses the changes he's seen during his four years as he prepares to depart office Sept. 15. He said his successor, Odd Olsen Ingerø, who also served as governor before Sefland's appointment, will find more of an international presence and less certainty about the future of coal mining than before.

Sefland still hopes to pursue goals

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"We have come to a new stage when it comes to coal mining's future," Sefland said. "It is more uncertain what will be the future of coal mining in Svalbard than when he was governor before."

Sefland said he is pleased by accomplishments such as improved relations with Russians on Svalbard and some environmental protections, but still wants to work for additional measures such as a total ban on heavy oil in the archipelago.

"During my stay for four years I have become much more aware we are living in such a vulnerable part of the world," he said.

Sefland was appointed to a three-year term, accepted the opportunity to serve a fourth year but declined a fifth, saying he wanted to return to working on the mainland, where he could also see more of his family and grandkids.

"I have never been in such a demanding, challenging and interesting post," he said. Also, "I have had serious problems with sleeping in the winter."

Sefland, a career law enforcement official, said he has ideas about what he wants to pursue next, but doesn't have a specific position lined up. He said he hopes the work allows him to continue being involved with Svalbard, where he also plans to return as a tourist.

His best accomplishment during the past four years, he said, has been "speaking with a clear voice to the Russians." There have historically been tensions between Norway and Russia both in Svalbard and nationally, but some positive changes are happening.

"What I have experienced in the last four years at the local level is the contacts have been very good and there are indications some problems are improving," he said.

Russians were reluctant for many years to accept environmental limits, for instance, trying instead to negotiate agreements, Sefland said. During the past few years, as a result of firm demands that they adhere to the same rules as Norway and other nations in Svalbard,

"more and more we are seeing they have increased their applications and we are increasingly giving them licenses."

There has also been progress on cooperative efforts cleaning up PCB toxins in Barentsburg and Pyramiden because "they understand it is their best interests."

But the Russians also face some of the worst economic hardships, especially with the Barentsburg fire reducing mining operations to only what's necessary to generate local power.

"They have been talking about (resuming) mining activity, but that will cost a lot of money," he said. "They had plans to do so, but with the financial crisis and drop in coal prices I'm not sure what are doing."

Russians are also trying to restore facilities to lure tourists, but the pacing and scope of the projects remain uncertain.

A second accomplishment, Sefland said, is "I have helped people in other surroundings with contingency plans and awareness, particularly with rescue operations and oil spills." Other Svalbard officials have said there are still issues to be resolved in those areas, as evidenced by difficulties getting to, assessing and removing the *Petrosavodsk* when it ran aground and spilled diesel on the coast of Bjørnøya in May.

A ban announced Friday on heavy oil in national parks on the west coast of Svalbard, similar to an existing ban on the east side, is among the environmental protections Sefland has worked for. But he said a complete ban in Svalbard is needed and warns "we must never have an oil spill in this environment."

A similar ban was enacted in Antarctica this year and cruise industry officials say voyages there are being reduced due to a significant rise in operating expenses. Sefland said he doesn't see the local economy suffering as much from a heavy oil ban, estimating 30,000 cruise ship visitors a year "only pass coastlines without making a major impact."

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

Fighting boredom



Youths face off on the mat as martial arts instructors look for new recruits during the Longyearbyen community activity fair Sept. 3 in Svalbardhallen. Activities including shooting, golf, choir, climbing and team sports are being offered as fall and darkness approaches. More information is available at www.svalbardturn.no.

Fate of missing plane remains a mystery

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20 nautical miles northwest of Bjørnøya on Aug. 24, hoping wreckage from the Latham 47 seaplane that sent its final radio message near there June 18, 1928, could be located using two undersea robots equipped with sonar and high-definition image capabilities. But after an international team of researchers did an initial examination of "some interesting contacts" in their final collection of data, they acknowledged no trace of the plane was found.

"A dead whale of exactly the same dimensions as the Latham engines, a box-shaped rock entangled in man-made debris (industrial fishing gear) and other curiosities served to pique our interest until the last retrieval of the ROV, but it was not to be," Rob McCallum, the expedition's leader, wrote in his blog Friday.

McCallum, a New Zealand explorer with extensive polar experience, also noted that in some ways "our expedition has been a great success." Researchers definitively eliminated the 117 square kilometers of ocean searched as a possible crash site. Also, they were able to

overcome operational difficulties.

"We retained enough redundancy in our planning that we were able to cope with the loss of one of our two ships, yet we have also kept the flexibility to alter our approach and our search area as we learnt more about the sea floor," he wrote. "Importantly, we have managed to operate around the clock without serious issue or any injury. In short, we have done exactly what we set out to do, and in these waters that is a very good indeed."

"But I do feel deflated for those who have tied so hard to find the Latham; the planners and organisers who have shepherded the project from its earliest beginning."

Amundsen, perhaps most noted for leading the first expedition to reach the South Pole in 1911, joined a rescue operation on June 18, 1918, after fellow explorer Umberto Nobile's airship *Italia* crashed due to harsh weather during its return voyage from the North Pole. The seaplane carrying Amundsen was among the rescue vehicles deployed.

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

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM SVALBARDPOSTEN VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

Historic sites closed, heavy oil banned on west coast

Eight sites in Svalbard are being closed to visitors and heavy oil is being banned in national parks on the west side of the archipelago, the governing council announced Sept. 4. The sites, at locations throughout Svalbard, are being closed to preserve cultural relics from damage being caused by traffic (map of closed sites). The oil ban, primarily affecting large cruise ships, extends a similar restriction for east Svalbard enacted in 2007. The new regulations take effect Jan. 1, 2010.

Spitsbergen Hotel closing early, laying off 22 workers

The Spitsbergen Hotel will close Sept. 25 instead of Nov. 1 and 22 employees are being laid off due to a sharp drop in business. Spitsbergen Travel Director Trygve Steen said operating income fell from 26 million kroner during the first half of 2008 to 10.8 million kroner this year. "The most central cause of the decline has been the course and conference market," he said, adding employees knew an early closure was possible. Layoffs will include seasonal, permanent and workers already on leave.

Wrecked Russian ship to remain at least until summer

The *Petrosavodsk* cannot be removed from the coast of Bjørnøya until at least next summer, according to the company hired to salvage the grounded Russian ship. The Norwegian Coastal Administration has told the Svalbard governor the alternatives are leaving the wreck on the beach or hauling it into deeper water out of sight, but cannot say which option is most likely. The ship is already broken in two and damage incurred during winter will make removal even more difficult. Titan Salvage estimates removal will cost more than 90 million kroner, more than the ship's owners may be required to pay - meaning the Norwegian state would have to foot some of the bill.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday

Clouds and sunshine. ENE winds at 14 km/h. High -1C (-3C wind chill), low -1C (-7C wind chill).

Thursday

Partly sunny, overnight snow. SSE winds at 8 km/h. High -1C (-1C wind chill), low -3C (-8C wind chill).

Friday

Morning flurry, then cloudy. E winds at 8 km/h. High -1C (-1C wind chill), low -2C (-6C wind chill).

Saturday

Clouds, then sun. NNE winds at 11 km/h. High -1C (-3C wind chill), low -8C (-11C wind chill).

Extended forecast: Sunday, sunny, 0C (-1C), -6C (-8C); Monday, sunny and cold, snow overnight, -5C (-6C), -6C (-10C); Tuesday, cloudy with a flurry, 2C (-4C), 1C (-4C); Wednesday, mostly cloudy, 3C (1C), 0C (-4C).

Data provided by AccuWeather.com



András Takács, at right in blue hat, exchanges words with United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, left, at the Svalbard Global Seed Vault during a Sept. 2 tour of the facility.

Svalbard among filmers' 'hot spots'

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they've covered, was motivated by this month's visit by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon as part of his campaign to combat global warming. The issue is expected to be at the front of the international stage during the U.N. Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in December.

"It turned out this is really a place where we should do a whole program for its own reasons," Takács said, adding that when it comes to other locations and issues in the series "it doesn't have to relate. It has nothing to do with the other parts."

Going to prominent global hot spots means documenting stories covered by thousands of other journalists. What, if anything, are they doing that will result in a tale not already told?

"We're not going to be as polite as other journalists," Cseke said.

Such bluntness was reflected in the perceptions and questions they had about Svalbard when they arrived.

"You have a village, a town, a community that isn't really real," he said. "You don't have births, problems, deaths. If you have somebody with problems you send them away. It is absolutely extreme."

"The strong survive, the weak go away," Cseke said. "What society works that way?"

Takács said he has a better understanding after a week in Svalbard why the area has some of the rules it does, but doesn't know yet what kind of narrative the show will feature.

"We understand a lot during the trip, but while editing even more, so I can't tell you exactly," he said.

The pair wasn't sure of their plans on their first full day in Longyearbyen, but by the end of it they were on a boat headed for a quick weekend trip to Barentsburg and Pyramiden before returning for Ban's arrival that Monday.

"We really like the spontaneous work," Takács said. "It's really important to us."

But capturing events on the fly does mean nerve-racking moments, Cseke said.

"Sometimes you can stick around for two days and just be pale, saying 'Wow, is it working?'" she said.

Careful planning is also part of their process, and it paid dividends in Svalbard as Takács got one of the few available media

spaces for Ban's trip to the Polar Ice Rim and scored a one-on-one interview at the end of the U.N. leader's trip. It was, Takács said, another time when questions outside the norm proved useful.

Other journalists were granted two questions apiece and generally made the same inquiries about global warming, Takács said. He and Cseke asked Ban for specifics about the effect of CO2 emissions on China's economic development and presented evidence argued by climate change skeptics.

"It was definitely the longestest interview (by the media) here," Takács said. "We loved it."

But the direct approach doesn't mean animosity. Ban, described as relaxed and friendly when not before the larger media packs, engaged in some playful individual moments with Takács while traveling to the ice rim and touring the Svalbard Global Seed Vault, including guessing the distance of a glacier the secretary-general was interested in walking on.

"He came back and talked to me and asked 'What is your guess? How far is the glacier?'" Takács said. "I thought one-and-a-half kilometers...I asked him what was his guess and everybody was laughing." (Turns out the glacier was 16 kilometers away).

Among the other locations in the series are Bolivia, Ethiopia, the Middle East and Everest Base Camp in Nepal. The latter focuses on exiled people from Tibet.

"We wanted to check how they live and they also have a lot of inner conflicts," she said.

Visitors attempting to climbing the world's tallest peak - or just making it to the camp at 5,360 meters above sea level - will be profiled as well since "we're also interested in how Western people react to reaching their dream."

Takács and Cseke said they have escaped serious mishaps so far, although there have been some close calls.

"We went down into the smuggling tunnels in Egypt and Gaza," Takács said. "Two days later they collapsed and one person died."

Getting into tumultuous areas where journalists aren't always welcome hasn't been a problem so far, Cseke said.

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

What's up

Sept. 8

10 a.m.: Meeting of the management committee, Næringsbygget 1, "Tundra" room.

Sept. 13

8 p.m.: Movie: "Hangover," U.S. comedy, ages 15 and up. Huset.

Sept. 22

7 p.m.: Local government board meeting. Mediateket.

Sept. 27

8 p.m.: Movie: "Public Enemies," U.S. drama, ages 15 and up. Huset.

Oct. 1

2 p.m.: Meeting of the culture and leisure board. Næringsbygget 1, "Tundra" room.

Oct. 2

9 a.m.: Meeting of the board of growth and enterprise. Næringsbygget 1, "Tundra" room.

Oct. 12

10:15 a.m.: Meeting of the environment and industrial committee. Næringsbygget 1, "Tundra" room.

7:30 p.m.: Book launch and slideshow, "Hiking In Spain," by Anita and Birger Løvland. Longyearbyen library.

Sept. 19

Noon-3 p.m.: Longyearbyen Hundeklubb open day. Private kennels will be open as dogs are presented, with children allowed to pet them and take short trips with a training cart. At the kennels near the polar bear sign on the outskirts of Longyearbyen.

Sept. 22

7 p.m.: Local government board meeting. Mediateket.

Sept. 24-26

Inaugural Oktoberfest celebration featuring beer from Norwegian and foreign brewers. Events include bands and lectures about the history of beer.

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:

- *Norway: Big oil has moral climate duty*
- *World's cleanest robot tests in Svalbard*
- *A clash of polar frauds and believers*
- *Rambo, sidekick to unload on the Arctic*