



Oops: It's still OK to be sick

NAV apologies for 'confusion,' says foreign workers can keep insurance during long absences

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

If last week's news about foreigners losing their health insurance if absent from their jobs was enough to induce a heart attack, at least now you can go to the hospital knowing you'll still be covered.

Officials with the Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration (NAV) are apologizing for "confusion" after discussing the apparent change with many of Longyearbyen's foreign residents earlier this month. The change, terminating coverage after 14 days of sick leave even for workers still employed or on maternity leave, provoked outrage from foreigners and local officials concerned about the societal effects of a two-tiered system.

The new policy was based on an interpretation of a court case that denied coverage to
See HEALTH, page 3



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Donations per resident to 2013 NRK telethon

| |
|-------------------------|
| Svalbard: 494 kroner |
| Utsira: 304 kroner |
| Boken: 247 kroner |
| Nationwide: 44 kroner |
| Central Oslo: 14 kroner |
| Marka: 14 kroner |

SOURCE: NRK

Vårin Sandring Storø, 15, top left, sings during at concert featuring a variety of students during an open day at Longyearbyen School on Oct. 17 to raise money for the annual NRK telethon. At right, Harmina Sinpru tries to knock over bowling pins at one of game booths at the school. Donations from Longyearbyen residents, lower left, were the highest per-person in Norway, continuing a trend of the city far exceeding the national average due to a month of high-profile community events.

Unforgettable coup

Telethon raises record funds for dementia aid; locals again give by far the most per person

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

Ordinarily, the mayor and town priest offering their companionship for money would be the stuff of scandalous headlines. But in

this instance their solicitations resulted in a different kind of sensationalism.

Bids on dates with the two, plus a few others who subsequently offered themselves, allowed Longyearbyen to surpass one million kroner in donations for this year's NRK telethon. While not quite a record, it is the first time that amount has been surpassed since Store Norske halted its tradition of large

See DONATIONS, page 3

Inside

| | |
|--|--------|
| JUNK SCIENCE! Yeti 'link' a hoax | Page 2 |
| Headlines from Svalbardposten | |
| - Outside experts assess safety in Barentsburg | |
| - Ministry: City charged illegal fee for road hookup | |
| - Main power plant shut due to leaking boiler | Page 3 |
| Weather forecast | Page 3 |
| Events calendar | Page 4 |

An encore mother lode of blues

Expanded band lineup, concert in Mine 3 return for second year at Dark Season Blues festival

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

It was supposed to be a return to "just" the usual Biggest Local Music Bash after last year's 10-year extravaganza. But this year's Dark Season Blues lineup suggests the party is still on.

A total of 15 bands, one fewer than last year, and an encore concert at Mine 3 are
See FESTIVAL, page 4



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

A packed crowd braves the cold at a concert in Mine 3 during last year's Dark Season Blues. Organizers say heaters and toilets will be at the long-abandoned mine for this year's concert.

Who's to blame and how to express your wrath

Editor

Mark Sabbatini

Principal of principles

Kristan Hutchison

Psychiatrist

Irene Gallion

Accomplice

Jeff Newsom

Mailing address

Icepeople
Vei 210 -2- 13
Longyearbyen, Svalbard
9170
Norway

Telephone

Norway: +47 41 51 46 38
U.S. +1 (970) 673-4472

E-mail

marksabbatini@yahoo.com

Web site

www.icepeople.net

Icepeople is published weekly (or thereabouts) on Tuesdays (or thereabouts), with printed copies available free on a limited basis in Longyearbyen. Additional printed copies are available locally and by mail upon request. Charges are on an "at cost" basis.

Copyright stuff

Original contents of this publication can be reproduced for non-commercial purposes free of charge if *Icepeople* is credited as the source. The original writers, photographers and other contributors retain their rights to all published works.

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.

Not to give this week's visitors the blues, but...



DANIELS KARIN AMBY

Polar bear tracks mark the snow near the Mine 7 road, where Daniels Karin Amby and two companions were biking about two weeks ago. Amby said she was going toward Mälardalen when she spotted the tracks about a kilometer from the road, according to *Svalbardposten*. Hunters notified the Svalbard governor's office Sept. 17 about a bear spotted and in Bolterdalen and it is possible it was the same animal.

Icesheet

Random bits of the week's weirdness:

We're shocked – shocked, we say – last week's screaming global headlines about a "100 percent match" of DNA from prehistoric Svalbard polar bears and the modern-day Abominable Snowman have proven to be utter bollocks. **Those two hair samples sent to a scientist from alleged yeti encounters in the Himalayas are almost certainly from just another bear, specifically a hybrid since they're from an era when the polar bear and closely related brown bear were separating as different species.** Anyone smart enough to believe in evolution (a minority of the population in certain countries) should have realized this if they remembered (or Googled) the barrage of stories announcing that latter scientific fact a few months back. But, hey, the Oxford scientist making the yeti claim had a "bigfoot" book and BBC documentary to promote, so it's understandable he sort of downplayed that ... Luckily, Svalbard's reputation as the Hoakist Place on Earth is still intact thanks to the latest article depicting it as another planet. **TG Daily (as in "tech generation") puts Svalbard at the top of their picks for "Finding Alien Worlds on Earth,"** noting the years of research done here involving the Curiosity rover now on Mars. Other places include the Dry Valleys in Antarctica, the Atacama Desert and the U.S. state of Arizona (which we'll charitably assume isn't a social/political observation). Svalbard is also included other recent "list" articles with headlines such as "The Weird Laws You Might Accidentally Break on Holidays" and "Top 10 Places to Ride Out Doomsday," but even we have our limits about how many times we can read the same "golly gee" musings that appear dozens of times every year ...



CATHERINE DOKKEN

Dog from another planet? No, but you won't know any better if you're reading the latest lamestream media writings about Svalbard.

Yet despite all the write-ups, it seems word of the actual serious work done here still hasn't gotten completely out, even here in Norway. **As UNIS was celebrating its 20th birthday last week, *The Norway Post* ran an article headlined "Svalbard – Norway's New Research Hub."** Um, not only has UNIS given Svalbard that claim for a couple of decades, but international scientists have also been flocking to research stations in Ny-Ålesund and elsewhere for kind of a while now ... Now that you've read through most of this rant and are still wondering **what's the deal with that surreal picture above, it was chosen as the best photo in an "Open Class" workshop involving 50 photographers.** It probably helped that Cathrine Dokken, 27, of Valdres, found herself in the same phantasmagorical mindset as her photo. "I became aware of the interaction between dog and man to cope with life on Svalbard, how the dog can handle nature and helps us humans," she told *Valdres*. "I forgot time and place, and almost stopped breathing."

This is your brain on darkness



COURTESY OF MARIE GEISER

Pedestrians roam the main avenue of Longyearbyen as various residents recount how their short-term plans became long-term stays in the documentary "The Living Longyearbyen." A free screening of the 53-minute film, which focuses on the experiences of five residents from a wide variety of backgrounds, is scheduled at 7 p.m. Oct. 31 at Kulturhuset. A trailer for the documentary can be seen at <http://tinyurl.com/nsaas4t> and full details about the project at <http://tinyurl.com/pdgszwz>.

Ministry: No change to insurance rules

HEALTH, from page 1

an African working intermittently in Svalbard. But Norway's Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, in a prepared statement issued quickly after media reports of the change, said that ruling will not result in an alteration of coverage.

"As long as you are employed by a Norwegian employer in Svalbard you will continue to have membership in the scheme," the statement notes. "This also applies when you are off sick from work and leave in connection with childbirth. Requirements are equal conditions for foreign workers as they are for Norwegians."

Workers lose coverage one month after their job ends, according to the ministry.

About 450 of the 2,200 people living in

Svalbard's Norwegian settlements are foreigners, reflecting a rapid growth compared to the 300 foreigners in 2009. A Facebook group and online petition were quickly launched in protest after the supposed change became public, resulting in numerous complaints about turning foreigners into second-class citizens.

"I am not proud of being a Norwegian citizen today," wrote Kai Ketil Sand in an Oct. 18 Facebook post. "Is the Norwegian government on the mainland trying to shut down Svalbard for others then the Nordic countries?"

"Maybe we should all leave and see how they would manage without us," Bjarki Friis quipped short time later.

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

Telethon for dementia sets national record

DONATIONS, from page 1

contributions a few years ago due to business struggles, said Inge Lene Villumsen, lead organizer for this year's local campaign.

This year's proceeds, totaling a record 224 million kroner nationwide, will benefit dementia treatment and research programs in Norway. Villumsen said the cause appears to be the reason for the high amount.

"It's something most people can relate to in one way or another," she said.

Locals had contributed 982,429 kroner as of Sunday night, but Sissel Helen Hultgren, the city's personnel director, challenged Mayor Christin Kristoffersen and Svalbard Church Priest Leif Magne Helgesen to offer themselves as dates. Villumsen said 5,100 kroner was raised for them, with bids for others and late contributions putting the total above the one million mark.

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

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM SVALBARDPOSTEN VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

Outside experts called in as Russia seeks to reopen mine

Independent experts from Norway and Germany assessed the safety of Barentsburg's coal mine this past weekend, a condition agreed to by Russian officials as they seek to reopen the mine following a string of accidents resulting in serious injuries and two deaths. Officials with the Russian state-owned company Trust Arktikugol, which oversees the mining community, and the acting Russian Consul General met with Norwegian Labour Inspectorate officials last week to discuss the latest closure of the mine following a Sept. 10 accident. "We can not let them open the mine as long as we do not feel it is prudent for people to work there," said Truls Johannessen, regional manager for the Labor Inspectorate. The Inspectorate is requiring an evaluation of rock stresses in the mine, saying they may be so great safe operations are not possible. A report is expected in about two months, "but we will consider the preliminary conclusions of the experts," Johannessen said.

City charged illegal fee for road hookup, ministry rules

The city of Longyearbyen charged an illegally high fee to connect an equipment rental warehouse to a city street, according to Norway's Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development. Johan Sletten, chairman of Bykaia Lagerutleie, has spent two years fighting the 953,000-kroner fee, which was based on the size of the building. The ministry ruled the fee should be based on the actual cost of the road connection. City Manager Lars Ole Saugnes said they are keeping the fee pending a legal and economic review of the decision.

Main power plant shut for a day due to leaking boiler

A leaking boiler forced the shutdown of Longyearbyen's main power plant Friday, although electricity to the city continued uninterrupted using the reserve facility. "We need to get this repaired as soon as possible," said Odd Jostein Sylte, the plant's maintenance supervisor. "If the water from the leak mixes with ashes and soot it will be like cement." Workers had to wait until Saturday morning for the boiler to cool enough to weld the leak.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

| Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|---|--|---|---|
| Cloudy. Variable winds to 25 km/h. High -7C (-12C wind chill), low -14C (-19C wind chill). Sunrise: 10:44a, sunset: 2:21p | Partly cloudy. NW winds to 25 km/h. High -13C (-18C wind chill), low -13C (-19C wind chill). Sunrise: 11:17a, sunset: 2:04p | Partly cloudy. NW winds to 32 km/h. High -12C (-17C wind chill), low -4C (-20C wind chill). Sunrise: 11:39a, sunset: 1:41p | Cloudy. Variable winds to 25 km/h. High -11C (-15C wind chill), low -16C (-21C wind chill). Sunrise: 12:17p, sunset: 1:04p |
| Extended forecast: Sunday, cloudy, -12C (-18C), -16C (-22C), light 0:00h; Monday, cloudy, -6C (-11C), -12C (-18C), light 0:00h; Tuesday, cloudy, -4C (-11C), -6C (-12C), light 0:00h; Wednesday, cloudy, -5C (-11C), -5C (-11C), light 0:00h | | | |

Data provided by storm.no

It's dark season blues, the lowercase version



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

A J.M. Hansen worker replaces an incandescent street lamp bulb with an LED bulb that uses less energy and lasts five times longer Monday afternoon. The new bulbs, which give off a blueish hue compared to the old lights, are being installed citywide during the next few weeks.

Blues are back big

FESTIVAL, from page 1

scheduled during the 11th annual festival beginning Thursday. Among the featured new and returning artists are longtime Norwegian legends Knut Reiersrud and Reidar Larsen, and U.S. performers Junior Watson and Victor Wainwright.

"For us, twelve is normal for bands," said Espen Helgesen, leader of the Longyearbyen Bluesklubb that organizes the festival. But during the booking process "we've been getting a lot of strong feedback (from) a lot of Norwegian bands."

Reiersrud, a guitarist/vocalist for the past 40 years, is scheduled to perform a trio of concerts, highlighted by a reunion Saturday night at Huset with Swedish guitarist/vocalist Sven Zetterberg. Both were members of the band Four Roosters during the 1980s.

Larsen, dubbed Norway's "Mr. Blues," is returning with his band The Storytellers after first appearing at Dark Season Blues in 2005. He will also perform with guitarist Arne R. Skage Jr. at a former blues dinner Friday Night at Spitsbergen Hotel, an event that traditionally sells out well in advance.

Foreign musicians are typically sought from those touring the mainland and Helgesen said strong relations with many of their bookers are key in getting some of the top-tier talent, such as Watson, a West Coast guitarist for the past 40 years, to appear.

"He's doing very few concerts on the mainland, so it's great he's here," Helgesen said.

This year's concert in Mine 3, used for the first time last year since mining was halted in 2007, features New Orleans-style guitarist Daniel Eriksen and drummer Stig Sjøstrøm. Helgesen said Store Norske has performed extensive work at the site recently and some of last year's rough edges, such as an absence of toilets, are remedied this year.

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

Dark Season Blues schedule

Thursday

11:30 a.m.: Concert for students by Yngve & his Boogie Legs. Longyearbyen School.
6 p.m.: Official opening of festival w/ performances by featured musicians. Kulturhuset. **Free.**
9 p.m.: Daniel Eriksen feat. Stig Sjøstrøm; Yngve & his Boogie Legs. Barentz Pub.
9 p.m.: Rolling Thunder; High Red. Svalbar.
9 p.m.: Reidar Larsen & The Storytellers; Sven Zetterberg Bluesband. Kroa.

Friday

10:30 a.m.: Concert for kids by Daniel Eriksen. Kullungen Kindergarten.
Noon: Blues lunch w/ Thor Lønning and Knut Hem. Barentz Pub. **Free.**
5:30 p.m.: Blues dinner w/ Reidar Larsen and Arne Skage. Spitsbergen Hotel. **Sold out.**
9 p.m.: Teresa James; Junior Watson. Barentz Pub.
9 p.m.: Stina Stenerud & her Soul Replacement; Mike Andersen. Svalbar.
9 p.m.: Knut Reiersrud & Hallvard T. Bjørgum; Southern Hospitality. Kroa.

Saturday

Noon: Blues lunch w/ Billy T. Band; Håkon Høye; interview w/ Øyvind Rønning. Barentz Pub. **Free.**
3 p.m.: Mine 3 concert by Daniel Eriksen feat. Stig Sjøstrøm. Bus from MIX kiosk at 2:30 p.m. **150 kr.**
3 p.m.: Thor Lønning & Knut Hem. Karlsbergen Pub. **100 kr.**

7 p.m.: Two-stage blues concert marathon. First floor: Daniel Eriksen feat. Stig Sjøstrøm; Billy T. Band; Teresa James; Yngve & his Boogie Legs; Rolling Thunder; Stina Stenerud & her Soul Replacement. Second floor: High Red; Reidar Larsen & The Storytellers; Southern Hospitality; Knut Reiersrud & Sven Zetterberg Bluesband; Junior Watson; Mike Andersen. Huset. Free bus from Karlsberger Pub at 6:40 p.m.

Sunday

6 p.m.: Knut Reiersrud & Hallvard T. Bjørgum. Svalbard Church. **100 kr.**
9 p.m.: Blues jam w/ Mike Andersen. Radisson. **Free.**

Bold type indicates events that are free or not included in the price of festival. Full details about artists and tickets are at www.svalbardblues.com.

What's up

Oct. 23

6 p.m.: Movie: "Gåten Ragnarok," Norwegian action/adventure, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

Oct. 24

5 p.m.: Paleontologist Jørn Hurum reads his new children's book "Utrolige Dinosaur." Longyearbyen Library.

Oct. 24-27

Dark Season Blues festival. See schedule at left.

Oct. 26

3 p.m.: Presentation by Jørn Hurum about his dinosaur and sea mammal excavations in Svalbard and other Arctic areas. Svalbard Museum.

Oct. 27

11 a.m.: Family Mass with baptism. Svalbard Church.

6 p.m.: Movie: "Gåten Ragnarok," Norwegian action/adventure, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Supervention," Norwegian documentary, no age limit specified. Kulturhuset.

Oct. 28

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

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

8 p.m.: Trivia quiz. Barentz Pub.

Oct. 29

7 p.m.: Interview of Peter Brugmans, directorate of mining for the commissioner of Svalbard, by Leif Magne Helgesen. Svalbard Church.

Oct. 31

7 p.m.: Documentary: "The Living Longyearbyen," featuring the lives of five local residents. Free. Kulturhuset.

Nov. 2

Midnight-10:30 p.m.: Movie marathon w/ discount prices. Full schedule available at <http://tinyurl.com/pwbseca>.

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:

- *Seafloor mining eyed in Norway's Arctic*
- *Global climate spending behind target*
- *Polar bears resort to eating goose eggs*
- *Climate change kills McD's Dollar Menu*