



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Liza Marchenko, left, and Ida Merethe, both 15, perform a dance routine Sunday at Kulturhuset during the UKM Svalbard competition. Marchenko was among the local youths selected to go to the regional competition in Tromsø for her artwork "Lekser."

Show of stars, surprises

Local stage of UKM sees familiar faces, unexpected judgements

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

Erle Haldorsen, 15, was a first-time winner in the local UKM talent competition last year, but she wasn't expecting an encore Sunday after a not-so-artful mistake.

"I actually forgot it was UKM, so I just took some pictures I had taken and made a video," she said.

But despite the hastiness, it was the discipline of her project, "Mitt Svalbard," showing

aspects of all forms of local life past and present, that helped convince judges to name her among this year's winners.

"I was really surprised," said Haldorsen, who will show the same video at the regional competition in Tromsø.

So were the judges.

"I was surprised how stringent she had been in directing herself," said Jan Martin Berg, who as manager of Galleri Svalbard

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A bit busier in bed

Hotel stays in Svalbard rise six percent in '11; more Norwegians, fewer foreigners in half-full rooms

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

Locals enduring the misery of an empty feeling in their beds are getting some hope of warmer nights ahead as the economy slowly recovers.

Hotel stays in Svalbard increased six percent in 2011 compared to 2010, according to Statistics Norway. The total of about 85,000 guest nights last year is about 5,700 more than 2010.

But local lodge officials can't completely embrace the results.

"Guests in 2011 used an average of 31 percent of the beds and 48 percent of the rooms on Svalbard," the agency stated in a report published Thursday. The totals, while respectively 0.8 and 3.4 percentage points higher than 2010, were affected somewhat by the opening of two new visitor accommodations last year.

Foreigners are an increasing percentage of Svalbard's residents, but it's Norwegians showing an increased desire for short-term sleepovers, representing 78 percent of all 2011 hotel night stays.

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A light case of blues at sunrise



COURTESY OF BJØRN BERGE

Bjørn Berge, whose concert at Huset in 2000 led to the start of the Longyearbyen Blueskulbb, returns Thursday for Vinterblues 2012.

Mini-festival celebrates return of the sun, revived economy and 10th year of Dark Season Blues

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

Don't let your ears deceive you – we really are at the end of the polar night, not the start.

But a moment's confusion is understandable for locals setting their calendar by when their ears hear a marathon of blues, as a first-ever Vinterblues festival begins Thursday. The

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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.

Totalitarian tunes



BARENTS OBSERVER

Five accordionists from North Korea play the a-ha hit "Take On Me" during the Barents Spektakel festival earlier this month. A video of the performance that has gone viral with more than one million views is at www.barentsobserver.com/north-koreans-performing-in-kirkenes.5019501-116320.html.

Icesheet

Random bits of the week's weirdness:

It's not entirely local, but close enough to our back yard we have to annex it for this extended "we discover how to do paragraphs" rant since it's captivating the World Wide Weird. The highlight of this year's annual Barents Spektakel festival in Kirkenes was five accordionists from North Korea performing an instrumental version of a-ha's landmark hit "Take On Me," with a video captured by the *Barents Observer* going virtual on YouTube.

"These musicians are among the best I have ever encountered," said Morten Traavik, a Norwegian artist who arranged the performance, in an interview with the BBC. "They are talented enough to be successful anywhere in the world."

"When I was in North Korea, I lent them a CD of 'Take on Me' on a Monday morning. By the following Wednesday morning they had mastered the song, with no annotation and no outside help. It showed incredible skill."

While the cultural exchange got all the jazzy headlines, the real item of interest to us iceolationists was a contingent of North Korean soldiers offering border security training to their Norwegian counterparts. Considering the Dear Leader's followers are arguably the best in the world at keeping nosy intruders out, that certainly offers intriguing possibility for our boundaries/fishing/other territorial disputes here with Russia (and soon to be China, et al).

Incidentally, it seems like they could offer breakthrough advice on climate change since the recently departed Kim Jong-il, whose birth reportedly "caused winter to change to spring, a star to illuminate the sky and rainbows to spontaneously appear," also possessed "magical power" to control the weather depending on his mood. But, like other climate remedies, there'd probably be controversy from skeptics wondering why he didn't prevent his women's football team from getting hit repeatedly by



Are supposedly extinct woolly mammoths roaming the Arctic? YouTube jurists worldwide are rendering their verdicts in droves this week.

lightening while practicing for the 2011 World Cup, which he blamed for their first-round defeat to that ultimate evil known as the U.S...

...While we're on virtual polar videos, we gotta mention one more of a supposed sighting of a woolly mammoth, supposedly extinct since roughly the Great Biblical Flood, crossing a river in the Russian Arctic. We'll skip the details and URLs (Google, unlike us, is your friend) and just note the videographer says he doesn't recall seeing any such animal...

... Keeping with spooky creatures, the Seed Vault militia can add another piece of evidence to their theory the Doomsday Deep Freeze is really a SPECTRE-like plot to take over the world. A document leak reveals Bill Gates, one of the vault's financial benefactors, is also a major supporter through the company he founded of an anti-climate change entity largely responsible for the current "hoax" mentality prevailing in the U.S...

...And in actual local news, we couldn't fit this anywhere else, so a hat tip to Trond Espen Haug, who set a new record of 50 minutes and 26 seconds during the annual Spitsbergen Up and Down race Saturday night. He credited good race conditions – rather amazing given our recent month of tropical weather – for beating the previous record of 54:10.



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Billy T, center, seen here performing at Barentz Pub during the 2009 Dark Season Blues festival, is scheduled to return to the pub with his band at 10 p.m. Saturday for Vinterblues 2012.

Vinterblues hails sun, anniversary

FESTIVAL, from page 1

three-day festival is primarily a celebration of the upcoming 10th annual Dark Season Blues at the end of October. But it also mirrors the onset of polar night that is the namesake of Longyearbyen's biggest music event, plus a desire by organizers to resume concerts at other times of the year that have been on hold lately.

"Before the Longyearbyen Bluesklubb did concerts all year, but then the economy went down," said Espen Helgesen, the organization's chairman. "We will start trying to do something again next year."

While the theme of Vinterblues is about looking ahead, its first concert Thursday is a return to the event that essentially gave birth to the blues club and festival. Bjørn Berge, a guitarist/vocalist who started his career in the 1980s, will make his first appearance in Longyearbyen since a performance 12 years ago inspired locals to book more such artists.

"It was after his concert at Huset in 2000 that we decided to form the blues club," Helgesen said.

Also returning is Erik Harstad, an acclaimed guitarist/vocalist for the past 20 years, who performs at 10 p.m. Friday at Barentz Pub. Harstad, who appeared at the 2007 Dark Season Blues festival, will lead a four-member

Vinterblues 2012 schedule

Thursday: Bjørn Berge, 10 p.m., Kroa.
Friday: Erik Harstad, 10 p.m., Barentz Pub.
Saturday: Billy T, 10 p.m., Barentz Pub.
Tickets: Thursday 250/150NOK, Friday/Saturday 100NOK. Available at the door.

band formed exclusively for Vinterblues.

The closing act also features a familiar face as Billy T, a performer at the 2009 Dark Season Blues, will play at 10 p.m. Saturday at Barentz Pub.

Although Vinterblues is a warm-up for its older sibling, locals wanting to hear any of the artists shouldn't wait, Helgesen said.

"The artists coming this weekend have nothing to do with who is coming in October," he said.

Dark Season Blues features multiple concerts in multiple venues most nights, but Helgesen said the single-show lineup of Vinterblues aims to whet listeners' appetites, not satiate them before fall.

Additional information and artists' videos and available at www.svalbardblues.com.

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

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM SVALBARDPOSTEN

VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

Two expelled from Svalbard by governor during past year

Two people – one penniless and one violating drug laws – were expelled by the Svalbard governor's office during the past year. A man arrested as part of an 11-person drug sting last October received final deportation orders in January and must depart by March 1. "He also has an entry ban of four years," said Lt. Gov. Lars Erik Alfheim. Penalties have still not been determined for two other people arrested in the raid and thus more deportation orders are possible, he said. The second person deported was a European man with no money. "More people are coming to Svalbard in the belief they can get both work and money," Alfheim said. "Most go home before it gets too critical, but some are here so long that they are no longer able to take care of themselves." He said the governor's office contacts family and friends – and their home country's government if necessary – to see if they are able to pay departure costs in such cases. The deportee is required to reimburse any costs incurred by the governor's office. There have been zero and five expulsions during the past 15 to 20 years, mostly for criminal offenses.

Longyearbyen wins close competition w/ Barentsburg

Longyearbyen scored a narrow victory at home over Barentsburg in the annual sports exchange between the two communities. Longyearbyen prevailed in football, hockey and basketball, while Barentsburg won the volleyball and table tennis competitions. The badminton match was a draw. Twenty-four residents of the Russian settlement arrived by helicopter for Saturday's competition at Svalbardhallen. They will get their chance or revenge when Longyearbyen visits Barentsburg in late March.

Full report of emergency drill at power plant made public

A report about an emergency drill at Longyearbyen's power plant cannot be kept secret by the city, the Svalbard governor's office has ruled. *Svalbardposten* protested the city's withholding of the report from the drill last November.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Partly cloudy. N winds to 29 km/h. High -17C (-28C wind chill), low -19C (-31C wind chill). Sunrise 0:00; sunset 0:00	Partly cloudy. Variable winds to 33 km/h. High -17C (-17C wind chill), low -25C (-34C wind chill). Sunrise 11:32a; sunset 12:53p	Snow. NE winds at 18 km/h. High -15C (-23C wind chill), low -21C (-31C wind chill). Sunrise 11:03a; sunset 1:22p	Snow. E winds to 18 km/h. High -10C (-17C wind chill), low -13C (-21C wind chill). Sunrise 10:42a; sunset 1:43p
Extended forecast: Sunday, cloudy, -12C (-18C), -13C (-19C), light 3:34h; Monday, cloudy, -13C (-19C), -14C (-20C), light 4:04h; Tuesday, cloudy, -13C (-18C), -14C (-19C), light 4:31h; Wednesday, cloudy, -14C (-18C), -15C (-20C), light 4:55h			
Data provided by yr.no			



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Marianne Krogness, a Norwegian actress visiting Longyearbyen, joins local residents on the judges' panel for the UKM competition Sunday at Kulturhuset.

UKM winners an easy judgement

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was selected as a jurist for his expertise in visual art.

He said the show opens with music typical of area videos and "the first thing that comes to mind was wading up to our minds in cliches. That didn't happen ... I was surprised at how strict she had been in keeping to the original title 'Svalbard Er Livet' (Svalbard is the Life)."

UKM, which stages regional competitions beginning at the end of March and the national event in Trondheim at the end of May, attracts about 50,000 youths ages 10 to 20 annually in all forms of performing and visual arts. This is the eighth year local youths have participated.

Other Longyearbyen youths selected to participate in the regional competition are:

- Vilde Markussen and Åsne Stokke Hansteen, both 13, for the song "Turning Tables."
- Marlene Mellum, 16, for her piano/vocal performance of "Drømmen."
- Emilie Sommervold, 17, for her art piece

"35 Dager" and Liza Marchenko, 15, for her art piece "Lekser."

- Photographers Mikhail Stepanskiy, 18, Emilie Ulsnes Sommervold, 17, and Ragnhild Beate Engan, 17, for their video "Folk."

Local organizers try to select judges who can be impartial in a tight-knit community – not always an easy task, especially when selecting the youth jurors, said Mari Tefre, the city's youth activities consultant.

But an esteemed outside critic was a last-minute addition this year as Marianne Krogness, a longtime Norwegian movie and TV actress, happened to be visiting during the competition.

"Having her there was a very safe and confident (presence) for the rest of us," Berg said.

As for scoring the winners, that turned out to be yet another unexpected element.

"I'm actually a bit surprised with how much we agreed," Berg said.

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

Hotel stays reflect mixed tourism year

SLEEPOVERS, from page 1

"The number of foreigners has gone somewhat down," with about 3,000 fewer arriving in 2011 than the year before, the report by Statistics Norway notes.

Travelers from Sweden and the United Kingdom were the most numerous, with each representing 16 percent of all foreigners. Germans accounted for 13 percent while Danes represented nine percent.

The totals reflect a mixed year for Svalbard's tourism industry in 2011. Flight arrivals were up less than one percent from a dismal 2010, while cruise ship visitors declined nearly three percent.

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



STATISTICS NORWAY

Norwegian hotel visitors (green) increased while foreigners (orange) decreased in 2011.

What's up

Feb. 15

6 p.m.: Movie: "Chronicle," U.S. action/thriller, no age limit determined. Kulturhuset.

Feb. 16-18

WinterBlues 2012, featuring artists from Dark Season Blues, which celebrates its 10th anniversary this fall.

Feb. 16

6 p.m.: Lecture by John-Eldar Pedersen about the memories of three generations of the Nøis family in Svalbard. Svalbard Museum.

Feb. 18

2 p.m.: Book presentation by Frode Skarstein, author of the triple biography "'Etterlysning: Gul Opel Kadett' - Polare Pilotpionerer i Krig" about WWI and WWII pilots Tryggve Gran, Hjalmar Riiser-Larsen and Bernt Balchen. Longyearbyen Library.

Feb. 19

6 p.m.: Movie: "Thale," Norwegian fantasy/thriller, no age limit determined. Kulturhuset.

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

Feb. 22

6 p.m.: Movie: "Play," Swedish drama, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

8:30 p.m.: Movie: "Shame," British/U.S. drama, ages 15 and up. Kulturhuset.

Feb. 23

7:30 p.m.: "Peer Gynt – Med Troll i Hjertet," monologue theater performance by Jeanne Bøe. Kulturhuset. Video preview available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=syeboHUxiX0>.

Feb. 26

6 p.m.: Movie: "Big Miracle," U.S. drama/romance, all ages. Kulturhuset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Safe House," U.S. action/thriller, ages 15 and up.

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:

- Leak shows anti-warming group's tactics
- AK glaciers losing 46B tons of ice a year
- Lengthy Arctic cold kills 215 in Russia
- U.S. spy drones to do good for Arctic?