



Scary Xmas

Locals facing layoffs trying to set crisis aside during what may be their last Christmas in Svalbard

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

Less than a week after Longyearbyen got some of its the grimmest news ever, locals circled around the town's Christmas tree singing as always. But there's no evil Grinch to blame for their soon-to-be-empty homes and little hope a miraculous transformation will fill them.

Hundreds may be spending their final holiday season in Svalbard due to Store Norske's plan to eliminate at least 100 jobs before the end of the year, which is expected to have a widespread ripple effect on other businesses. So while Christmas is usually a season full of anticipation, many residents are avoiding thinking about the holiday and/or what their fate may be afterward.

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Longyearbyen youths, above, put letters into Santa's mailbox at the base of Mine 2B during a torchlight procession from Huset to the center of town Sunday to celebrate the beginning of Advent. At right, locals gather in multiple circles for the traditional dance and songs following the lighting of the town's Christmas tree. While there was a brief mention during the celebration of the hardship many are facing, the mood and events were generally unaffected. Photos by Mark Sabbatini / Icepeople.



'Tis not the season to beg for alms

Norway may lack spirit of giving due to oil slump, political woes

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

There's no such thing as an ideal time to be begging for your survival, but the crisis

threatening Store Norske and many in Longyearbyen is happening when national and global entities who might be of help are experiencing severe problems of their own.

Norway's Conservative-led government is scrambling to deal with a collapse in oil prices that is threatening its budget plans and have

sunk the kroner to a five-year low against other currencies. A majority of Parliament also favors ridding Norway's oil wealth fund of all coal investments, opening lawmakers to accusations of hypocrisy if they take such action at roughly the same time they vote to provide the

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Store Norske gets greenie gift

Struggling coal company biggest winner in latest round of grants for local environmental projects

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

It's only about 1/500th of what the company expects to lose this year. But right now any opportunity to earn money in a way other than mining is a gift.

Store Norske will receive 835,000 kroner for two tourism projects, including its long-planned mining museum in the abandoned
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MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

A small bit of light? Store Norske's abandoned Mine 3, seen here filling up with visitors for a concert, may get more bus traffic in the future with the help of a grant the company received to turn the site into a mining museum.

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.

Ice caving trip ends painfully



TROND OLSEN / SYSSELMANNEN

Rescuers tend to a man who slipped and injured his back in an ice cave on Larsbreen on Wednesday night. A group of five students equipped with ice axes and crampons was exploring the cave when the accident happened, with some of the students requesting help from The Governor of Svalbard at about 6:30 p.m. Rescuers and medical personnel responding by helicopter took about three hours to remove the man from the narrow passage using a stretcher and fly him to Longyearbyen Hospital. He was flown to University Hospital of North Norway in Tromsø for further treatment Thursday.

Icesheet

Random bits of the week's weirdness:

Money's definitely going to be a lot tighter for many locals this holiday season, but **we don't recommend by purchasing the extra-thin and long-expired condoms in the clearance bin at Svalbardbutikken.** On the other hand, there's an argument being made that it might be just the thing to help Longyearbyen cope with the potential loss of hundreds of residents. "It's thoughtful of Svalbardbutikken to make an effort to increase the population," wrote Marte Agneberg Dahl, a UNIS Arctic Nature Guide participant who posted a picture of the 3.90-kroner prophylactics on a community Facebook page. Of course, that depends on how amorous each partner feels upon seeing those red clearance stickers ... But if there's any feeling of being romantically misled, they won't be alone as **the archipelago earned a not-so-honorable place in Huffington Post listicle "10 Lies That Ruined Relationships."** Their web crawling turned up a Reddit user (at tinyurl.com/pjg9u8r) who complained her former flame "lied about being Norwegian ... he



MARTE AGNEBERG DAHL

Blame it on a limp summer: If more people had been having sex in July, they wouldn't be risking having unwanted kids for Christmas.

backed this up by learning Norwegian so well that he had Norwegian friends who not only believed he was from there, but knew the area he came from by his accent/turns of phrase. Also claimed: to be pagan; to have been in the Norwegian army based in Svalbard for a year; to be incredibly wealthy; to be a year older than he really was." Setting aside the rather glaring lie that Svalbard doesn't have an army outpost, some commenters felt the complainant should have been flattered. "Learning a whole language to back up your lie. THAT is dedication," one wrote. Another declared "if someone lied to me with this degree of sophistication they'd have my total admiration, if not quite respect. and then I'd be terrified of what else they could lie so convincingly about, and break up with them" ... Finally, speaking of break ups – or being put on ice, if you like – **a video showing a glacier growing, flowing and getting chomped from seven different perspectives is now online** at tinyurl.com/odhl6h4ng after researchers at UNIS and the University of Edinburgh set up timelapse cameras on Kronebreen that took pictures every 30 minutes between May and September.



UNIS

The really chilling threat: Never mind watching the glacier vanish like a pizza at a frat party – it's product placement logos that are having the most ruinous effect on the Arctic landscape.



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

The Store Norske Men's Choir rehearses for a concert in the abandoned Taubanesentralen cable car station in June. The coal company is planning to renovate the station as a tourist attraction.

Lit-up clouds to measure wind

PROJECTS, from page 1

Mine 3, making the company the largest individual recipient of 6.36 million kroner awarded to 36 projects from the Svalbard Environmental Protection Fund. The awards were announced last Tuesday, one day after the coal company said is eliminating at least 100 of its 340 jobs due to a crisis caused by low coal prices that has the company facing bankruptcy.

"In light of the report we received from Store Norske's board of directors, we hope this can be a little encouragement," said Morten

Ruud, chairman of the environmental fund's board, in an interview with *Svalbardposten*.

Store Norske has struggled to obtain sufficient funds to complete the museum in Mine 3 it hopes to open by the company's 100th anniversary in 2016. In addition to the 470,000-kroner grant for the museum, the company will also receive 365,000 for renovation work to the Taubanesentralen cable car structure that towers above Longyearbyen.

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

Lit-up clouds to measure wind

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additional funding Store Norske says it needs to continue operating beyond the first quarter of next year.

Some observers have said Prime Minister Erna Solberg's coalition could be threatened due to the oil crisis that is adding pressure to a highly controversial national budget proposal that seeks tax cuts seen as benefitting the wealthy while tapping a record amount from the oil wealth fund. While that is generally seen as a worst-case scenario, the stark reality of such a possibility is being observed this week as Sweden's newly elected government is verging on the brink of collapse due to its own budget turmoil.

Instability in other neighboring govern-

ments is having a more direct negative effect on Svalbard's future economic prospects.

The collapse of Greenland's government in September due to an expenses scandal has dealt a critical blow to the country's future mining plans, potentially depriving Longyearbyen of revenue it hoped to collect by serving as a stopover port for mineral shipments to Europe.

Longyearbyen's neighbors in Barentsburg may also be facing prolonged hardship since, in addition to low prices, Russia's currency has collapsed 40 percent this year – much of that in recent weeks – due largely to sanctions stemming from the Ukraine crisis.

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

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM SVALBARDPOSTEN

VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

Longyearbyen has least- and most-expensive gasoline?

Longyearbyen's only gas station is both the least- and most-expensive in Norway, depending on the argument made, according to its owner. Svalbard Auto is charging 9.05 kroner and 9.15 kroner per liter of gas and diesel, respectively, slightly below the lowest mainland price of 10 kroner for each in Oslo. But the mainland price also includes more than seven kroner in taxes and other fees not levied in Svalbard. Roger Eriksen, general manager of LNS Spitsbergen, which owns Svalbard Auto, said shipping, maintenance and other costs result in the higher fuel prices.

Serious ship accident likely every six years in Svalbard

A ship accident involving the release of fuel or cargo is likely to occur in Svalbard every six years on average, according to two studies by a foundation analyzing future traffic patterns. Fishing vessels are likely to be responsible for most such incidents since they account for two-thirds of marine traffic, but accidents involving large cruise ships are likely to have the greatest impact due to their size. The studies by DNV GL, which is owned by the Det Norske Veritas foundation, report there have been 48 ship accidents during the past 15 years in Svalbard, although most did not result in significant release of pollutants or damage. The studies project a 29 percent increase in vessel traffic during the next 15 years, with a large portion of that coming from cargo ships using the Northeast Passage.

Hermansen pays off debt by selling cabin to Bodø man

Former Store Norske Administrative Director Robert Hermansen has sold his cabin near Longyearbyen for 2.5 million kroner, which he said which allow him to pay off debts after his imprisonment due to a corruption scandal. The cabin was purchased by Benn Eidissen, a Bodø businessman, through his company, Isfjord Eiendom AS, since individuals not living in Svalbard are not allowed to own property in the archipelago. Eidissen said the cabin will initially be used by his company, but it may eventually be rented out.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Cloudy. E winds to 65 km/h. High -9C (-18C wind chill), low -12C (-21C wind chill).	Cloudy. E winds to 50 km/h. High -9C (-16C wind chill), low -13C (-21C wind chill).	Snow. E winds to 65 km/h. High -11C (-19C wind chill), low -13C (-22C wind chill).	Snow. Variable winds to 22 km/h. High -10C (-15C wind chill), low -12C (-19C wind chill).
24-hour darkness	24-hour darkness	24-hour darkness	24-hour darkness
Extended forecast: Sunday, p. cloudy, -11C (-16C), -12C (-17C), light 0:00h; Monday, cloudy, -11C (-16C), -15C (-20C), light 0:00h; Tuesday, cloudy, -14C (-20C), -15C (-20C), light 0:00h; Wednesday, cloudy, -12C (-21C), -15C (-23C), light 0:00h			
Data provided by storm.no			



A long line of kids, above, happily accept gifts and possibly have their belief in Santa tested as a trio of the jolly old elves bring their bags of presents to Longyearbyen's central square for the First Sunday of Advent celebration. At right, two youths get off to a slightly early start at the post office/bank building in this year's Christmas 10K race. Photos by Mark Sabbatini / Icepeople.



Christmas arriving in midst of crisis

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"I think we're trying to not think so much about it," said Nicklas Øyen, a miner at Store Norske for the past two years, referring to the layoffs. "I have a lot of good friends here and we take care of each other."

Store Norske leaders said the layoffs are necessary because the company is expected to lose up to a record 400 million kroner this year due to a slump in coal prices that is expected to last indefinitely. Officials said assistance from banks and Norway's government are also necessary for operations to continue beyond the first quarter of 2015, when the company's cash reserves will be depleted.

The company's board of directors is expected to present a restructured operating plan to government leaders in January. Among the expected provisions in the plan is halving the company's mining production in 2015, according to *Svalbardposten*. Parliament will likely need to approve any requests for assistance.

Øyen, who works in Mine 7, said he's almost certain to lose his job due to his lack of seniority. The company has started its plans to contact all workers who are being downsized before Christmas and Øyen said he has a 30-day notice period in his contract, so "I'm taking it week by week."

He worked as a cleaner for ISS at the Svea mine for two years before joining Store Norske and said he will try to find yet another job so he can continue living in Longyearbyen.

"I like it here," he said. "I will try everything."

That won't be an option for Endre Nævdal,

a Transocean Spitsbergen worker who's already learned he's among those being laid off due to low oil prices crippling that industry as well.

"My business is now in pretty much in the same situation as this," he said. "I'm working all through Christmas. If I'm not working it's all over."

That means his wife, Eilen, a teacher at Longyearbyen School, and their two children may soon be facing a move back to the mainland. She said they aren't changing their holiday plans, which consist largely of relaxing and welcoming visiting family members, but they will miss the town if they leave.

"The community is much more inclusive than I expected," she said.

Hundreds of residents gathered together Sunday afternoon for a series of traditional events celebrating the beginning of Advent. While a brief mention of the Store Norske crisis was made during a speech just before the lighting of the Christmas tree in the town's central square, the overall mood was seemingly normal as residents sang, danced in circles around the tree and collected early gifts from a trio of visiting Santas.

But a less festive mood was revealed in an online *Svalbardposten* poll asking if residents are getting into the Christmas spirit now that December is here. Of 282 people responding by Tuesday, the most popular answer – albeit by a single vote – was "I don't care so much about Christmas."

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

What's up

Dec. 2

7 p.m.: Catholic Mass by Marek Michalski. Svalbard Church.

Dec. 3

6 p.m.: Movie: "The Hunger Games: Mockingjay Part 1," U.S. drama/thriller, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

Dec. 6

7 and 9 p.m.: Holiday concerts by the NRK boys' choir Sølvguttene. Kulturhuset.

Dec. 7

11 a.m.: Second Sunday of Advent Mass. Svalbard Church.

5 p.m.: Movie: "Kaptein Sabeltann og Skatten i Rama Lama," Norwegian adventure/family, ages 7 and up. Kulturhuset.

7 p.m.: Movie: "Miraklene i Toscana," Italian/Swiss/german drama, ages 7 and up. Kulturhuset.

Dec. 8

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

Dec. 9

7 p.m.: Longyearbyen Community Council meeting. Næringsbygget 3, Newtontoppen room.

7 p.m.: Evening Mass and fireplace social. Svalbard Church.

Dec. 10

6 p.m.: Movie: "Bjørnøya," Norwegian documentary, all ages. Kulturhuset.

Dec. 11

6 p.m.: Tribute to Alf Prøysen, legendary Norwegian writer/musician, on what would have been his 100th birthday, by Longyearbyen Culture School. Kulturhuset.

Dec. 14

5 p.m.: Christmas concert featuring Polargospel, Longyearbyen Mixed Choir, Tundradundrene and other local performers. Svalbard Church.

5 p.m.: Movie: "The Rocket," Australian family/adventure, 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:

- *Russian jet nearly hits NATO jet at Bodo*
- *Emissions big target at Lima climate talks*
- *Study: Polar bear may be extinct by 2100*
- *2014 warmest ever...but 'no big deal?'*