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Tom Baetens, Tim Van Aelst and Bart Cannarts of Flemish production house Shelter

Lucky bastards

The future has never looked brighter for Flemish television

Lisa Bradshaw

With the establishment of a Media Fund and an international Emmy Award, Flemish TV is finally taking off. Media minister Ingrid Lieten will be joining local TV producers and the Flanders Audiovisual Fund next month for the biggest television industry event in the world.

You might say that they are victims of their own success. The Flanders Audiovisual Fund (VAF) was so efficient at funding and promoting feature films and documentaries that surely, the Flemish government thought, they could do the same with television?

That's why the marketing team of VAF is heading to Cannes next month – not for the coveted film festival (that's in May), but for MIPTV, the world's biggest TV industry event for marketing, sales and rubbing shoulders. "I have a meeting

every half hour of the day," says Sue Green, who represents three Flemish television producers. "I get requests from all over the world for meetings. I try to see everyone who asks, but I'm already running out of slots!"

Green represents the New Flemish Primitives, a consortium of three producers, who are normally competitors, but, she says, "decided that internationally, there was more strength in numbers".

This is also the view of the VAF, which can now offer producers who used to go it alone at MIPTV an umbrella under which to present themselves. The VAF stand provides meeting places and technical facilities so producers can show clips of their programmes to potential buyers from other markets. And that is the hope of every production company – not just that your quiz show or comedy series is popular at home but that other countries or regions will want to option the format of your

show. They make their own versions of the show, and you get paid for the original idea.

Sometimes, you might even get more. Flemish producer and director Tim Van Aelst, for instance, spent last summer in Los Angeles as executive producer of *Off Their Rockers*, the American version of his company's hit show *Benidorm Bastards*.

The Media Fund

At the end of 2010, Flemish media minister Ingrid Lieten created the Media Fund within VAF for the funding of quality television projects and to promote Flemish TV internationally. An annual sum of €4 million comes from Lieten and an additional €2.52 million from culture minister Joke Schauvliege. "I specifically chose not to give this money to the public broadcaster but to create an independent fund so that private companies,

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FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope



Karen Spruyt

As academic honours go, there can be few more warmly given than the one granted last week to Karen Spruyt, who is an assistant professor in paediatrics at the University of Chicago.

"The school contacted all my old teachers and fellow students – teachers all the way from pre-school to my last year in secondary school – and then they had a presentation about what I was doing and what I'm working on in America, and then a reception," she says. "I had no idea it was going to happen."

Professor Spruyt was born and raised in Geraardsbergen, East Flanders, before studying clinical psychology and child neuropsychology at the Free University of Brussels (VUB), where she still also teaches. Her PhD was in paediatric sleep problems, which she continues to research in Chicago. She has published a book on the subject, aimed at parents, and publishes numerous papers on sleep problems. Spruyt regularly visits other universities in Belgium, the US and Australia to speak about the subject, including the link between sleep disorders and other health problems.

► www.tinyurl.com/karenspruyt

"One of the problems we discovered," Spruyt says, "was not only a short duration of sleep but also the lack of sleep quality, which leads to other problems like a loss of cognitive function." The worldwide trend, she says, is towards children sleeping less than before because they are involved in more activities. A good indication of whether a child is sleeping enough is whether he or she wakes up spontaneously. "Someone who has had enough sleep will wake up on his own, especially during holiday periods," she says. If the child needs an alarm clock, that's a sign that there's a problem. And the solution to lack of sleep is, quite simply, to go to bed earlier. A toddler needs 10 to 12 hours of sleep a night, and a pre-schooler 11 to 13 hours. "Children of school age should be getting a good 12 hours," she advises, "with an absolute minimum of 10." And as most parents probably suspect, computers and games consoles have a negative effect on sleep, especially if the devices are in the child's bedroom.



FLANDERS TODAY

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Joske Plas

News in brief

A man who **drove his car into a motorcycle escort** waiting outside the royal palace in Laken earlier this month wanted to speak to the king, he has told investigators. Eight police motorcyclists were injured in the attack, one of whom remains in hospital. The 39-year-old man from Willebroek, Antwerp province, originally said he intended to die in the attack and asked a policeman to shoot him when that failed. He is now detained in the psychiatric wing of Vorst prison awaiting trial on attempted murder charges.

Jan Goossenaerts, **the oldest man in Flanders** – and believed to be the oldest in Europe – died last week in a rest home in Essen, Antwerp province, at the age of 111. Born in 1900, Goossenaerts attributed his long life to the good air of the Kempen and to hard work, first as a farmhand and then as a bricklayer. Following his centenary, he declined to give interviews. "I already said it all the last time, and nothing in my past has changed," he once told a reporter.

Children from 198 schools across Flanders last week took part in marches on **World Water Day** to call for more attention to the need for clean water and better sanitation for children around the world. Some children in the developing world have to walk an average of six kilometres a day to find a clean water source.

► www.milieuorganopschool.be

Peter Holvoet-Hanssen, a former city poet of Antwerp, has been awarded this year's **Ark Prize**, awarded by the Ark Committee for the Free Word. Holvoet-Hanssen was praised for the way he made poetry accessible

OFFSIDE

Freedom for Baltonia!

Imagine the scenario: The capital city of Baltonia is in the throes of civil disturbance after the president refuses to give up power following an electoral defeat. In the city are a number of Belgians and citizens of friendly nations providing relief to the Baltonians, but they now have to be airlifted out. Their rescuers are 1,300 Belgian troops from line battalions in Spa, a parachute battalion from Tielen and the army's air and medical divisions, not to mention 150 French paratroopers. The civilians to be airlifted number 600, and the whole operation will take place in May. But wait, you protest: If the Belgian military can carry out such an operation in this hitherto unheard-of place called Baltonia, why don't they do something for the far more serious situation in Syria?

The newspapers seem strangely devoid of information on this latest crisis, and the reason for that is simple: The whole thing is an exercise, to be carried out in Antwerp – posing as the capital of the fictional Baltonia – from 7 to 11 May. And you could be involved, as one of the civilian volunteers.

The defence ministry will start practising for the exercise, code-named Operation Active Trip, in early April in Brussels, behind closed doors or barbed wire, as the case may be. Later the practice moves to Melsbroek air base. Only on 9 May do civilians become involved, and 600 extras are being sought.

You'll need to be prepared,

created the Fire Stress Team in 1993 and a decade later helped set up the European Association of Fire and Rescue Psychologists.

The family of amateur photographer Hector Dehaeck (1886-1949) have **gifted his archive to the city of Ypres** in West Flanders, where he kept a bakery for many years. The archive contains thousands of photographs of Ypres and the surroundings taken during the first half of the 20th century and includes sporting and cultural events, markets, accidents and the ordination of priests.

► www.westhoekverbeeldt.be

Limburg-born fashion designer Kristof Buntinx is to set up a **co-housing project for older gays and lesbians** in Brussels to tackle the problem of loneliness among elderly members of that community. The HolebiHome will provide single occupants with their own apartment in a communal house. Buntinx originally intended to set up a rest home, but failed to find subsidies. The plans will be presented at an information day in Laken on 15 April.

► www.holebihome.be

Antwerp-born film director **Ulu Grosbard**, who left the city during the Second World War after training as a diamond cutter, has died at the age of 83 at his home in New York City. Grosbard, whose original forename was Israel, assisted on such classics as *The Hustler* with Paul Newman and *Splendor in the Grass* with Natalie Wood and Warren Beatty, before going on to direct films like *True Confessions* with Robert De Niro and Robert Duvall and *Falling in Love* with Meryl Streep and De Niro.

Alan Hope



according to the army website, to camp in "primitive conditions" (like a scout hall) and to be patient. You should be in good physical shape and ready to be evacuated by a C-130 transport plane from somewhere in the east of Antwerp to Florennes military base in Wallonia. Anyone interested can sign up online.

► www.mil.be/armycomp

Lucky bastards

Flanders has traditionally flown under the radar of international buyers

► continued from page 1

producers and cable companies can all introduce projects," says Lieten. Just like for films, the VAF receives applications for funding from TV producers and decides which projects to fund. Fiction, documentary and animation projects are all considered. VAF also assists with selling Flemish TV formats to other markets at venues like the four-day MIPTV and its sister event MIPCOM in the autumn. Pierre Drouot, director of the VAF, says that the basis for success in both areas is the relationship between his organisation and producers. "We are in close contact with TV producers; we listen to their needs," he tells me. "That's the same approach we take with film; it's the quality of the relationship that counts – communicating needs and exchanging information."

Though some may raise their eyebrows at the idea of the government funding television outside of the VRT public broadcaster, Lieten's decision has potentially wide-reaching consequences: "We are a very small cultural region," she says, "so we think that it is very important that we don't just see American series or documentaries on TV, but also series, movies, documentaries and

animation in which the creativity comes from people within Flanders."

MIP-what?

MIPTV (Marche International des Programmes de Television) was launched in the 1960s and this year will welcome 4,000 buyers from 100 countries, making it the largest TV industry event in the world. This year minister Lieten will spend a day at MIPTV to see exactly where her money is going. "Maybe she'll even be motivated to spend more," smiles Drouot, "once she sees that the funding is well invested."

VAF plans a working lunch with the minister and Flemish TV producers "so both parties can learn from each other," says Drouot.

Minister Lieten echoes the thought: "I want to learn, both from our local people who are there in a group and from the international people. I want to see whether our policy is accurate now, or if we still need to change it for the challenges that lie ahead."

On the day of her visit, the VAF will host a reception called A Taste of Flanders' Creativity, open to interested MIPTV attendees, which will showcase the creativity of the Flemish audio-visual industry with trailers of several local productions



Undercover investigation with a sense of humour: The format for *Basta* has been sold to the US

and also culinary specialities of the region.

"A sign of success would be that I have the feeling that our local people could play an active role," says Lieten, "that they have a lot to offer visitors and that they were able to make useful contacts."

Three's Company

Last year three Flemish production houses – De Filistijnen, deMensen and the well-known Woestijnvis, creator of shows like *Man bijt hond* (*Man Bites Dog*) and *De slimste mens ter wereld* (*The Smartest Person in the World*) – hired Sue Green to represent them collectively in the international market under the moniker The New Flemish Primitives.

"Nothing was really happening before," she says about the selling of Flemish TV formats abroad. "In terms of self-promotion, they have never really done that in the way that, say, the Dutch do. The Flemish are modest about it."

It's a Flemish trait, to be sure, but in this case, it was hurting the industry. "They have very interesting ideas and make fun and entertaining television that appeals to a wide audience," says

Green. But no one outside Flanders was seeing it, and producers were not taking advantage of the financial resources generated by the selling of those interesting ideas.

There have been exceptions, most notably Woestijnvis' *De Mol* (*The Mole*), which, since its debut in the late 1990s has been sold to 47 territories, including major English-language markets like the US, Britain and Australia. *The Mole*, in fact, could be credited with sparking a bit more interest in Flemish productions. And now that Shelter's *Benidorm Bastards* has won both Europe's Golden Rose and America's Emmy Award for best comedy, Flemish TV is poised to really take off.

Green, a British national, used to work for Fremantle, one of the largest TV production and distribution companies in the world. After marrying a Fleming, she settled in Flanders about six years ago. "I used to say to them at Fremantle that they should take a look at the programmes that were being developed in smaller markets, and especially in Flanders," she says. "In the olden days, the big companies looked mainly to key television markets for intellectual properties

– the UK, the US, France, Germany. Now the world is more globalised, and they are going out to smaller markets."

And Green, 47, is making sure they don't miss Flanders. She has made a deal with the Fox network in the US to produce *Basta*, the clever undercover journalist show that made headlines early last year. Norway has bought *Tomtesterom* (represented internationally as *How To*), the reality show where people put how-to books to the test, and it's being considered by three English-language markets. France is looking into making their own version of *De slimste mens*.

The quality of programming in Flanders tends to be high, says Green, because of its acceptance of subtitles and, hence, international programming. "The Flemish have a tradition of watching BBC series and other international series, so there is a certain quality threshold that is already in place. Local programmes are on a par with programmes coming in from the outside that are being made with far, far bigger budgets."

► www.mipworld.com



Sue Green of The New Flemish Primitives in one of dozens of meetings at last year's MIPCOM, the sister event of MIPTV

WHAT IF... A TINY FLEMISH PRODUCTION COMPANY BECAME RICH AND FAMOUS?



Tim Van Aelst and 90-year-old Betty White, host of *Off Their Rockers*

When a door closes, a window opens, so they say. When, a few years ago, the parent company of production house Toreador shut down, four colleagues, who produced such shows as *Trigger Happy* and *Tomtesterom*, decided to start up another company that would focus on comedy: "To start with a clean slate," says Tim Van Aelst.

In the three years since, Shelter has produced three programmes, including what have become two of the most popular shows in Flanders: *Benidorm Bastards* and *Wat als? (What If?)*. The format of the latter is currently being sold to the Netherlands, the Ukraine and Canada. *Benidorm Bastards*, meanwhile, won the coveted Golden Rose for best comedy and went on to win Flanders' first-ever

international Emmy Award for best comedy. It's being aired in 33 territories around the world, and 25 more have bought the rights to make their own versions. It seems that old people pulling pranks on youth on hidden camera isn't only amusing to the Flemish. The US version, called *Off Their Rockers*, will begin airing next week. The NBC network has added a host – former Golden Girl Betty White – and Aelst went to Los Angeles last year to act as executive producer. The preview of the show in January garnered 12 million viewers – roughly twice the population of Flanders. Van Aelst laughs when I suggest that other production houses must hate them right about now. "I don't think they hate us! We have a lot of friends in the business. We are all used

to working with small budgets, and the people I know are used to working hard. At Shelter, we work very hard, and if you combine that with simple ideas and good execution, you can get very far."

They have to work hard since, despite obvious success, they are still only a team of four. "I hate staff," Van Aelst smiles. The four do all the writing and all the directing. "Comedy is a very hard thing to do," he says. "You can't just call anybody who works in TV and ask them to write sketches."

But he's not complaining. It's an "insane" schedule, he admits, "but this is what I love to do".

► www.shelter.tv

Funerals held for bus crash victims

Mourners from across Flanders filled the halls and spilled on to the streets

Alan Hope

The funerals of the 28 victims of the school bus crash in Sierre, Switzerland, took place last week in Lommel and Heverlee. People from across Flanders attended to say farewell to the 22 children who were killed in the 13 March accident, as well as two teachers and two members of staff accompanying the ski party.

On Wednesday in Lommel, a memorial service was held for 15 children from the sixth class of 't Stekske school and teacher Raymond Theunis. The 14 white coffins – one of the boys had been buried privately by his family, but was represented by a class photo – were carried into the Souverein function hall by soldiers. A capacity crowd of about 8,000 people was joined by the king and queen, Prince Willem-Alexander and Princess Maxima of the Netherlands (some of the schoolchildren were of Dutch nationality), European Council president Herman Van Rompuy, Swiss president Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf, prime minister Elio Di Rupo and Flemish minister-

president Kris Peeters. The ceremony was led by singer and TV presenter Bart Peeters, and the audience, including thousands gathered outside to watch the proceedings on giant TV screens, heard emotional words from mayor Peter Vanvelthoven, the director of 't Stekske, and friends and family of the deceased.

Lommel plans monument

Following the ceremony, mayor Vanvelthoven said he was making plans to erect a monument to the Lommel victims. "This is without a doubt the blackest day in the existence of Lommel, which goes back 1,000 years, because we have said goodbye in one day to 15 children and two adults," he said. The next day, about 7,000 people were at St Peter's church in Leuven, this time to mark the passing of seven children from the Sint-Lambertus school in Heverlee, a district of Leuven. The coffins were



again borne in by soldiers, and the ceremony was officiated by Deacon Dirk De Gendt, who had spent the previous week ministering to the families of those involved in the crash. The ceremony was also attended by the royal and political representatives present on Wednesday, as well as Dutch prime minister Mark Rutte

and Leuven mayor Louis Tobback. Meanwhile, it was announced that three girls who had been in intensive care in a hospital in Lausanne were now out of comas and on the way to recovery. Two of the girls suffered skull and other fractures, and one had injuries to her spinal cord. They have since been transported home.

Taskforce sought for crèches in Brussels

The Flemish and French-speaking communities in Brussels need to set up a task force to deal with the serious shortage of places in Dutch-speaking crèches in the capital, according to Jean-Luc Vanraes, chairman of the Flemish community commission (VGC), which looks after Flemish affairs in Brussels. Brussels currently has about 1,300 too few places in crèches to meet demand, and in some areas children from homes where Dutch is the mother tongue cannot find places for their children, despite a new rule which reserves 55% of places for them. The Flemish region recently made 35 new places available, but that is not enough, according to Elke Roex, a Flemish socialist member of the Brussels parliament.

"The efforts undertaken by the Flemish community and the VGC are praiseworthy," Vanraes agreed. "But they are clearly not sufficient."

Recently the French-speaking community considered taking legal action over the quota for children from Dutch-speaking families, claiming it was discriminatory. A planned new decree that would set language standards for care staff has also caused problems: 27 crèches have decided to cross over from Kind & Gezin, the Flemish regulator, to the French-speaking counterpart ONE as a result. Many families, particularly among immigrant communities, send their children to Flemish crèches in preparation for Flemish primary schools, where the language abilities gained are considered to give them a better chance of finding jobs later. Flanders' welfare minister Jo Vandeurzen this year set aside €7 million for extending the provision of day care for children under the age where they enter the pre-school system. But only 5% of that, or €350,000, goes to Brussels, the half of the subsidy paid last year. "That amounts to about 35 places," Roex said.

Changes from 1 April

Several changes in regulations come into force on 1 April.

The **indexation of energy prices** is frozen for nine months, until the end of 2012. Belgian prices for gas and electricity are higher than in any of the neighbouring countries. In addition, energy costs weigh heavily in the calculation of the price index, which in turn affects inflation.

The value of some **green energy certificates** paid out to homeowners who have installed solar panels goes down from €250 to €230 for installations up to 250 kilowatt-hours. The certificates for installations above that limit remain the same at €90.

Employers will now **pay a larger contribution** towards the payment made to workers who take early retirement or "bridging pension". For existing arrangements, the increase is 10%, while for new arrangements the cost increases in inverse proportion to the age of the worker concerned – the younger the worker taking early retirement, the more an employer will have to pay.

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

20%

of the average household food budget spent on vegetables and fruit, according to a study by Ghent University

75%

of burglaries in Antwerp go unsolved because of lack of evidence or because the burglar cannot be traced, the prosecutor's office revealed

1,467

job-seekers from Wallonia were able to find jobs in Flanders last year with the help of the employment and training agency VDAB and its Walloon counterpart Forem

3rd

place for Brussels in a list of the 10 European cities most affected by tuberculosis, a disease associated with poverty. London and Birmingham in the UK topped the list

€4.6 million

approved by Flemish heritage minister Geert Bourgeois for the second phase of the restoration of the Sint-Baafskathedraal in Ghent, which will involve work on the tower and several windows

FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

The phantom menace

Subsequent state reforms have shaped this country into what some believe is an institutional jungle. The outcome may look ugly, but at least it is the result of the so-called Belgian compromise, which requires a lot of creativity. That same creativity is used when budgets need to be cut. Thus when the federal government – always short of money – found out it was paying for competences for which the regions and communities are now responsible, it promptly decided to scrap all these expenses. Cutting budgets can be as easy as that. And as Flanders is traditionally in favour of more devolution, it could hardly protest.

These "usurping competences", as Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters would call them, began a life of their own, as for months no one really knew what they were and what sums they represented. They even became a symbol of political lingo that nobody understands. To remedy this, the radio show *Peeters & Pichal* organised a contest to come up with a new name for "usurping competences" (which in Dutch sound even worse).

"Cuckoo" or "hanging competences" were some of the suggestions, but, in the end, the jury, consisting of one man – Kris Peeters – decided on "phantom competences". (Not before mentioning, however, that the correct term should be "federally financed regional and community competences".)

The term "phantom competences" refers not only to the shadowy existence of the matter but also to a phantom limb, the pain people feel for some time after an amputation. Another advantage, as Peeters pointed out with some humour, is that the term is easily understandable for our French-speaking compatriots.

The situation did not remain that jolly. When the federal government produced a list of the usurping – pardon, phantom – competences, Peeters was outraged. Confronted with the document by the opposition in the Flemish parliament, he told them that they might as well "rip the thing up".

The problem is that the list not only contains phantom competences, such as some city policy and scientific institutions, but also "elements of responsibility" (a better term, anyone?). The federal government also asks regions and communities to chip in for things such as their civil service pensions and Belgium's contribution to the EU. This makes the bill much spookier than the government of Flanders had expected.

Peeters has announced that he will not accept this without a fight. So if you hear some bumping in the night this week, you know exactly what phantoms are responsible.

Parental leave extended

Increase to four months in line with EU directive

Alan Hope

The federal government took the decision last week to extend parental leave from three months to four. Parental leave, as opposed to maternity leave, is open to both parents, who are able to spread the allocation over time until the child is 12 years old, by shifting, for example, to half-time or part-time work for a period. The extension is effective from 8 March and also allows a benefit of €700 a month for the fourth month. The extension of parental leave is in line with an EU directive, but the provision of a paid benefit is an initiative of the Belgian government. "If we wish to raise the number of people in the labour force and the age at which people

leave work, we have to give them the opportunity to reconcile their work and private lives at busy times," work minister Monica De Coninck said in a statement. "By paying during the fourth month, we are making parental leave accessible to all."

Unions reacted positively to the news, but criticised the decision to restrict payments of the benefit to only those parents whose children were born or adopted after 8 March this year. The unions claim that discriminates against parents whose children are still under 12. Voka, the Flemish chamber of commerce, argued that the new legislation was introduced against the advice of the social partners,

and that its effect on the budget was not compensated by savings made elsewhere. "It's enormously significant that this is happening in a time of economies and that the social partners are being ignored," commented Jo Libeer, managing director of Voka.

Voka has joined calls for the whole system of time-credits to be reviewed, "not only because they are an administrative burden... especially for the many small businesses among our members," Libeer said, "but also because parental leave has for years been one of the growing costs within the benefit system."

For the Neutral Union for the Self-Employed (NSZ), the new



© Stephen Lux/culturalCorbis

leave "is too crazy for words... especially since Europe didn't make the payment for the fourth month obligatory. All over, people are tightening their belts, and it's simply unthinkable that such a luxury measure should add to the cost burden on society."

Agreement on new Terneuzen-Ghent lock

Flemish public works minister Hilde Crevits last week signed an agreement with her Dutch counterpart on the construction of a second sea-lock at Terneuzen in the Dutch province of Zeeland, which will allow the passage of larger ships to the Port of Ghent. Sea traffic arrives at the Port of Ghent via the Westerschelde – the mouth of the river leading to Antwerp – and the Terneuzen-Ghent canal, opened in 1827. The canal is of vital importance to the economy of the city and the region: Ghent is the third-largest of Flanders' ports, after Antwerp and Zeebrugge. The port employs 70,000 people directly or indirectly: 15% of East Flanders' employment.

The construction of the lock – 427m long, 55m wide and 16m deep – is expected to start in 2015, with the first ships passing through in 2021. The cost of the project is estimated at €1 billion, of which the Netherlands will pay some €142 million, with the remainder split between the Port of Ghent and the government of Flanders. In addition, the Dutch government will pay €150 million towards adjustments to the existing Terneuzen-Ghent canal, with the Flemish government paying the rest. Crevits will



The sea canal at Terneuzen in Ghent

apply for a subsidy from the European Union, which could cover up to 40% of the cost. Business organisations on both sides of the border, including Voka East Flanders and the port authority Vegho, said they were "especially pleased" with the agreement. "The decision on a second sea-lock will ensure an improved outlook for existing companies, to allow them to go ahead with their own investments," a statement said. "Improved access is of major importance to all sectors active in Ghent."

Chinese choose Willebroek for business hub

A group of 63 Chinese businesses, each among the top three in its sector, last week visited Willebroek in Antwerp province as a first step towards setting up a headquarters there. The group, Aigo Entrepreneurs Alliance (AEA), came as a follow-up to the signing of a memorandum of understanding with Groep Bernaerts during last year's trade mission to China in October. Groep Bernaerts, a leading property group, is behind the creation of European Market City in Willebroek.

The visit brings to an end two years of searching by AEA for an appropriate location from which to launch a commercial attack on the European continent. Flanders was chosen, the group said, for its central location, multi-lingualism, reasonably priced real estate and, not least, the package Bernaerts has put together for them.

That consists of tailor-made conditions for establishing a business and then bringing in customers. In its Dragon Rising Service programme, its China Brand Center and its customer attraction service, Bernaerts has been given the support of the government of Flanders, as well as the federal government and the Chinese ministry of commerce.

The first 30 companies will begin to settle in right away. Another 300, all members of the AEA, will follow later.

THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

Air Transport

► Brussels Airport

Brussels Airport plans to invest up to €460 million to build 20 additional gates adjacent to its Pier A Schengen terminal. Included in the project is a new luggage sorting facility. The move expands the airport's capacity by 18% and will be finalised by 2016 at the earliest.

Autos

► Moorkens

Antwerp-based car distributor Moorkens has acquired 34% of the French Bernard Group, a leading distributor of some 33,000 Renault, Peugeot Citroen and Mercedes cars a year.

Banks

► Belfius

The newly named Belfius Bank, successor of ill-fated Dexia, is selling its landmark Dexia Tower on Rogierplein in downtown Brussels. Potential buyers for the €225 million building are said to include the Flemish government, looking for office space to centralise many of its operations. Belfius is also looking to sell its French Dexia and Luxembourg International Wealth insurance activities.

Bio-technology

► ThromboGenics

Leuven-based bio-tech company ThromboGenics, specialised in the research and development of ophthalmic medicines, has signed a sales and distribution agreement with Alcon, an affiliate of Novartis, for its Ocriplasmin treatment against vitreomacular adhesion, a debilitating eye disease. The deal is said to be worth some €375 million.

Feed

► Hendrix

Animal feed group Hendrix, based in Ingelmunster, West Flanders, and with activities also in the Netherlands and Germany, has been sold to the Dutch ForFarmers group for some €92 million. With nearly 700 employees, Hendrix had sales of some €830 million last year.

Pharmaceuticals

► Omega

Pharmacy group Omega, based in Nazareth, East Flanders, is paying €470 million, its largest acquisition ever, to buy the European over-the-counter activities of GlaxoSmithKline (GSK). Omega Pharma has sales in 35 countries including across Europe and in India, Australia, New Zealand and Argentina.

Retail

► Toison d'Or

Toison d'Or shopping centre on Gulden-Vlieslaan in Brussels has been sold for some €62 million by its original 1960s developers, the Gillion family and ING Bank, to the British Prupim property investment group.

Q&A



Peter Dedrij is the director of new innovation centres in Kortrijk and Genk, opened last week by Microsoft

stimulate the IT industry in Flanders in the field of health, in line with the Flemish government's Flanders in Action plans for 2020. We'll do that by offering advice and guidance to start-up companies set up to provide services, develop applications and so on. The first goal is innovation and the second is employment.

How many jobs do the centres create?

We'll have two people in each centre, a project manager and an office manager, and of course I'll be overseeing the whole thing. As far as indirect employment goes, we go by the example of the MIC

that's already in Mons, which has brought the region about 300 jobs. For Kortrijk and Genk, we're setting a target of 30 new companies employing a total of 300 people within three years. It's a modest target, and we'll probably exceed it because of having two centres in Flanders.

Why did Microsoft choose Flanders?

The main reason is that both towns have a strong innovation policy, and there are already a lot of activities going on. Of course it would have been easy to choose Antwerp, Brussels or Ghent, but we chose those two because if you look

at the map, with both Kortrijk and Genk on board, we've enlarged our footprint, if you will.

What will be Microsoft's role?

We're there to provide know-how. We're not there to reinvent what's already there; we're joining forces with existing bodies like the IBBT, which runs boot camps for start-ups, to organise speakers from outside on things like economics and marketing and, if necessary, to draw on our own resources within Microsoft and within the networks we've already built up in the Benelux.

► www.microsoft.com/mic

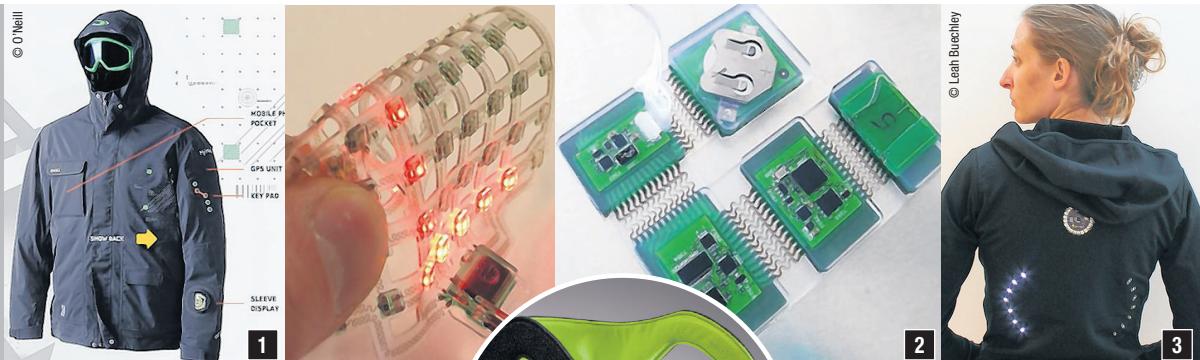
What are the innovation centres for?

The first purpose of the two innovation centres will be to

SMART TEXTILES

Integrating electronics into everyday objects could have a big impact on fashion and health

What if we could make electronic components and circuits flexible, stretchable and washable? Then we could integrate those components, such as LEDs and sensors, into everyday objects. We could make dresses that light up, handbags with interior lights, jackets with an integrated GPS.



Jan Vanfleteren leads the renowned Ghent Centre for Microsystems Technology (CMST), a Ghent University laboratory associated with the Leuven-based nanotechnology institute imec. "Stretchable electronics are virtually non-existent today," he says. "One of our lab's activities is to develop the technologies for watertight, flexible and stretchable electronics. These could then be

explains Vanfleteren. "The technology we develop is based on miniaturised rigid electronic components or flexible electronic components [organic electronics] that are connected to each other with stretchable interconnections." These interconnections are meander-shaped, which is the secret behind their stretchable character. "Stretchability of 50% and more is achieved," Vanfleteren continues. "The electronic components and interconnections are completely embedded in an elastic material such as silicone or polyurethane. The majority of the

"Sensors could be integrated in sports shirts to monitor heart rate, or even provide full ECG recordings"



BMW wants to replace traditional textiles in a car interior with electronic textiles that interact with passengers

integrated in textiles for fashion, healthcare or automotive applications."

The first examples of electronic textiles are coming to market. However, these are often handmade products from which the electronics need to be removed before washing. "New technologies are needed to make this electronic textile low-cost, reliable and more user-friendly,"

processes used are close to conventional PCB [printed circuit board] technologies, which is important for potential industrialisation."

In 2011, the CMST lab developed prototypes to demonstrate the feasibility of their technologies. A stretchable fitness demonstrator was developed with Philips, along with a stretchable LED display

for integration in textiles. "Within five years, our technology will be mature enough to be used in real products," says Vanfleteren. "I believe that fashion and professional clothing will be important markets. The trend towards wearable health sensors will also benefit



The Undercover blanket contains 24 wireless speakers, allowing you to feel the vibrations on your body and creating a private mobile soundscape

greatly from stretchable electronics technologies. Sensors could be integrated in sports shirts to monitor heart rate, or even provide full ECG recordings. A pyjama shirt could be equipped with motion sensors to register sleep quality. A baseball cap with sensors would be a useful tool for epilepsy patients to detect seizures. Sensors could also be invisibly integrated in car interiors for all sorts of applications."

European efforts to manufacture smart textiles

PASTA (Platform for Advanced Smart Textile Applications) is a European FP7 project. From 2010 to 2014, research and industrial partners will study the development of large-area smart textiles. Four application areas are addressed in the project.

1. A radio frequency identification chip integrated into a textile yarn will be used as a manufacturing process control device and for anti-counterfeiting purposes.
2. Bed linen will be fitted with integrated sensors to signal excessive humidity due to bed-wetting.
3. A safety application will be developed based on integration of building evacuation markings using LEDs in a textile carrier.
4. A fabric will be developed that allows non-destructive in situ monitoring of accumulated stress in composites to predict the residual life time and indicate damage to industrial components.

During their world tour, the Black Eyed Peas wore luminescent costumes with Philips technology. Organic I-LEDs were integrated in a dress programmed to pulse and change colour with the beat of the music (right)



Photos:

1 ▶ The Nav jacket from O'Neill is designed for skiers and incorporates a GPS module

2 ▶ Two of the CMST lab's prototypes featuring the most advanced technologies for stretchable and watertight electronics. Left: Elastic fitness monitor with motion sensors, wireless radio and processor to calculate the number of calories used. Right: 7x8 passive matrix LED display with enhanced breathability and flexibility

3 ▶ LEDs are used in this turn signal bike jacket. It's a great product to enhance the visibility and safety of cyclists

4 ▶ The ledBAG was created by a Polish designer in 2009. It has LEDs integrated on both the inside and outside of the bag. Today, it is distributed by Hedoco. The firm has an open-licence philosophy that allows users to "hack" the modular structure of the bag and alter its functionality. For example, you could make the lights turn on when movement is detected or when a mobile phone rings

Good buddies

Mentors in Antwerp aim to build self-esteem among students of foreign origin

Andy Furniere



© Corbis

A movie, a museum, the zoo or a simple trip into town with a buddy could be the key to improving confidence and school performance among students of foreign origin in Antwerp. The city is currently training the first 20 of 100 coaches who will help students of foreign origin in the first three years of secondary education to perform better in school. The idea is that the coaches, aged between 20 and 30, will become role models who help build the pupils' self-confidence.

Starting next month, coaches will spend at least one hour of quality time a week with a student of foreign origin in Antwerp. "The coaches should take the role of older friends who understand what it's like to be young and that growing up while also having to concentrate on school is not always easy," says Leen Verbist, Antwerp's alderwoman of social services and diversity. "The goal is to make pupils stronger and teach them how to make their own

choices about their future." Antwerp's schools will offer students the chance to participate; students decide for themselves if they want to be part of the programme. Coaches are then matched to students principally according to common interests – for example, a love of football. "During the time together, the coach is there to listen to what worries them, to pat them on the back and congratulate them. In that way, they build pupils' self-esteem," explains Verbist.

As preparation, the coaches are given training in youth support. The inspiration for the project comes from the Dutch city of Den Haag. For 10 years, the city's Centre 16-22 has trained coaches who each support a pupil of foreign origin. "With great success," emphasises Verbist. "Their personal commitment increases, and their school results improve considerably. We hope to similarly boost the motivation of our pupils." The project is a valuable initiative,

according to Rina Rabau, who leads Antwerp's office of the Minderhedenforum (Minority Forum) – the Flemish umbrella organisation for ethnic minorities. "Around half of all pupils with a foreign background in Flemish education don't finish secondary education. This kind of buddy project could be helpful to all students irrespective of ethnic background," she says.

An outside view

Rabau is especially glad that the youngest pupils in secondary school are targeted: "It is during those puberty years that, to a large extent, your personality is formed. Some extra support during that often tough process would be more than welcome." The great advantage, she says, is that students extend their network and get to know different views and opinions from those of their usual circle of family and friends.

The coaches should not necessarily have to share the same background as the pupils, says Rabau, as long as they understand the sensitivities of their culture. "However, some groups have indicated that they would appreciate coaches of the same origin because they would have knowledge of the specific behavioural codes, the family situations and cultural background." She would like to see the families involved, too, to make the link stronger.

Looking forward to the start, Rabau hopes the educational side of the project is not neglected. "After creating a strong relationship, the coaches should give advice on school assignments and study methods as well as on personal issues," she says. "The activities should also be educational, indirectly. That does not mean they will be boring – going to the zoo, for example, also broadens and nurtures the minds of young people."

THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

For the third edition of English@Work, 19 students from the Sint-Jan Berchmanscollege of Diest and the British School of Brussels in Tervuren swapped their classrooms for English-speaking business environments for three days. The initiative offers Flemish pupils the opportunity to practise their business skills and practical English. Among the participating companies were BP, Toyota and Hydro. Flemish and English-speaking students worked in pairs on specific projects during the programme.

Students and lecturers at the Flemish Aviation Training Centre connected to the Catholic University College of Bruges-Ostend are building an unmanned aerial vehicle that should help to make more exact predictions of coastal weather. The vehicle, called Litus (Latin for "coast"), is a robot that flies autonomously according to a programmed mission. Litus is electrically powered with green energy from solar panels and wind power.

► www.khbo.be

The Belgian Nuclear Research Centre will celebrate its 60th birthday with an open day on 18 May. The centre has laboratories in Mol and a registered office in Brussels. With more than 700 employees, it is one of Flanders' biggest research centres. The centre focuses on the safety of nuclear installations, sensible management of radioactive waste and the protection of humanity and environment against ionising radiation. Anyone who is interested in going to the open day must apply at least one month in advance.

► www.sckcen.be

In 2011, 4,835 young people in Flanders tried to obtain their secondary school diploma via the exam commission, an increase of 5.4% compared to 2010 and 54% more than in 2003. The figures come from minister of education Pascal Smet. Two groups go to the commission: those who don't succeed in regular education, and those who consciously choose this formula, such as students who are home-schooled.

Researchers at the University of Antwerp have discovered a lost drawing by Vincent Van Gogh. With a new technique using X-rays, they exposed a sketch of two wrestlers under Van Gogh's painting of a still-life of flowers. From his letters, it appears that the Dutch painter made the sketch in 1886 when studying at Antwerp's art academy. The painting, called "Flower Still Life with Field Flowers and Roses", can be seen at the Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterlo, the Netherlands. AF

A new home for virtual worlds

The University College West Flanders (Howest) has started building its prestigious 3D Competence Centre in Kortrijk. This high-tech school with a Bachelor's in Digital Arts & Entertainment, unique in Flanders, will also function as an incubator for start-up companies in the gaming and interactive 3D technology sectors.

The centre requires an investment of €4.5 million, partly financed by Flanders and Europe, and should be ready by the beginning of next year. Since 2006, DAE has been training students to become active in the gaming industry and interactive 3D sector. "They learn to create games, movies, commercials and simulations," says Yves Pauwels, a lecturer in 3D techniques. "But



An artist's impression of the new 3D Competence Centre in Kortrijk

it's not just for the entertainment sector; the technology can, for example, help to prepare people to fight fires by simulating a fire in a virtual environment."

About 450 students are following the courses at Howest. Among them are many international students, as it is

possible to take the lessons in English. Next year, students will be able to work at the centre's green key studios, where a green screen and special effects technique allow actors to enter imaginary situations in a virtual world. With

motion-capture technology, they can adapt the movements of people to create realistic animations. Students will also have access to the newest audio and montage technology. Howest plans to hang an LED display, often used to project adverts, on one of the centre's walls, to show

► www.howest.be

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Peter Paul Rubens

Self-portrait © Rubens House, Antwerp.



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The last of the Flandriens

Dieter Gussé has become famous racing in the classics on a bike from 1926

Andy Furniere

Dieter Gussé not only looks rugged, with his long hair and black sideburns, he is also rake-thin like a professional cyclist. It's no wonder: This 35-year old technician from Deinze, East Flanders, cycles about 4,000 kilometres in preparation for Flanders' "cyclotourist" classics. There's nothing too eccentric about that among Flemish cycling enthusiasts, but Gussé has ridden the majority of those kilometres on a racing bicycle from 1926. On this bike, and in matching authentic outfit, he takes part in, among

With this feat – which takes him 12 hours – Gussé honours the legendary pioneers of the Flemish cycling tradition: the "Flandriens". "I want to bring to life the stories of these hardened farmers' sons who rode their primitive bikes on roads full of holes," he tells me. "Pictures and movies are not enough to keep their memory alive." Although the best Belgian cyclist of the year is still rewarded with the "Flandrien" trophy, Gussé feels there are no longer any Flandriens. "Until the 1940s, cycling meant surviving," he says. "Cobblestones were the

"Until the 1940s, cycling meant surviving; cobblestones were the good roads"

others, the cyclotourist races of the Paris-Roubaix and the Ronde van Vlaanderen, or Tour of Flanders, coming up this Sunday.

Meet Dieter, the last Flandrien.

Known to the public as Didier de Flandrien, Gussé (*pictured*) is a museum on two wheels at the amateur portion of the Tour of Flanders. Sitting on the type of racing bicycle with which Flemish cyclist Lucien Buysse won the 1926 Tour de France, he wears a woollen jersey and short pants, leather shoes, an old cycling cap, dust glasses and tubes around the shoulders. Before each of the 16 hills of the 244-kilometre course, he has to stop and turn around his back wheel so he can change gears.

good roads back then. I can only give a glimpse of the conditions they had to ride in."

Celebrity bikes

Gussé has turned his garage into a treasure trove of old and new cycling memorabilia. Among his collection is an authentic bike from 1903 and one that belonged to Tom Boonen, who is again a favourite for the Tour of Flanders this year. All the bikes are restored to their exact state by Gussé and most are signed by their former riders. "I invite them to check if everything is as it was when they sat on them," Gussé emphasises. Sometimes he has to keep quiet about how he got their bicycles. "I couldn't



© Florian Van Eenoo

even tell Lucien Van Impe, former winner of the Tour de France, how his bike ended up here," he says, mysteriously. "I promised the man who gave it to me." Gussé also collects cycling jerseys and all the accessories that he can find. The seed of this extraordinary hobby was planted by his father and uncle, both of them cycle enthusiasts. "Their stories fascinated me as a child, and I soon got on the racing bicycle myself," he says. About 10 years ago, he became absorbed in the history of Flemish cycling and began restoring an old

bicycle. "It got seriously out of hand," he smiles.

Gussé is not alone in his passion. Every year in October, about 3,000 cyclotourists ride 205km of dusty Italian roads in the Strade Bianche. All the bikes are at least 25 years old and have authentic parts. Gussé is the only Fleming who takes part, among riders from all over the world. He hopes that the similar Retroronde (Retro Tour), held in Flanders for the past six years, will convince Flemings to join him in his hobby. "There are now about 100 participants, and every year there

are more," he says.

At the end of our conversation, I ask Gussé whether he feels like he was born in the wrong era. "Absolutely," he answers without hesitating. "People sometimes wonder if I torture myself on that primitive bike to stand out, but I actually feel so comfortable on it that I really enjoy all the lonely training rides as well. Glad as I am to share my knowledge of past times with others, I never wanted to cause a sensation."

► www.didierdeflandrien.be

Pedalling globetrotters

Two Antwerpenaars cross the world on a multitude of bicycles

Andy Furniere

After spending six years travelling 120,000 kilometres through 55 countries on all sorts of bicycles and other non-motorised vehicles, Nicole Dierckx and Ingrid De Wilde, both 49, are back home in Antwerp. This latest trip has been their longest, but in 1990 the *globetrapplers* (global pedallers) cycled to China, and in 1994 they set off on a trip that lasted more than four years.

Now they are touring Flanders with a slideshow and writing a trilogy about their adventures. The first volume is called *Op het ritme van de Toeareg* (With the Rhythm of the Toeareg). Before they're off again on another adventure, we talked to them about their experiences.

Are you glad to be back?

Nicole: I enjoy the luxury. Taking a bath, sitting on chairs and sleeping in a bed are all very special. At first

I felt like a tourist in my own city, especially when mayor Patrick Janssens showed us all the changes of the past six years. I also had the urge to cycle at least 75 kilometres a day because that was our routine during those years.

Ingrid: If I didn't cycle, I got cramps in my legs during the night. I kept eating like a wolf because we needed the energy during our trip. I also had to get used to wearing more clothes than the two outfits I wore for those six years.

Wouldn't it be a lot easier by car or public transport?

Ingrid: We did a "normal" first world trip together in 1987 but soon got frustrated by all the arranging it required. Then we met a Dutchman in Indonesia who travelled around the world with a bicycle and immediately knew this was what we wanted.



Nicole Dierckx (left) and Ingrid De Wilde

Nicole: On a bicycle, you are independent but also garner sympathy. In Africa, tourists riding in a 4x4 are often pelted with rocks, but we were invited to dinner by local people. Also, by cycling we hope to promote eco-friendly

legs in the air: Let's say people were not used to such a sight!

When are you off again?

Ingrid: There is still so much to discover, so I would definitely like to travel again. The only thing is, if you make plans, you want to leave as soon as possible. For the moment, we are concentrating on our slideshows and our trilogy.

Nicole: You think twice when you're approaching 50. But I'm sure we'll make other round-the-world trips – in wheelchairs with solar panels if necessary!

Ingrid and Nicole present slides and stories of their trips on 29 March in Aalter, East Flanders. For a complete schedule of appearances, visit the website

► www.nicole-ingrid.be

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The size of our footprint

Flanders produces a groundbreaking report on the agricultural contribution to greenhouse gases

Alan Hope

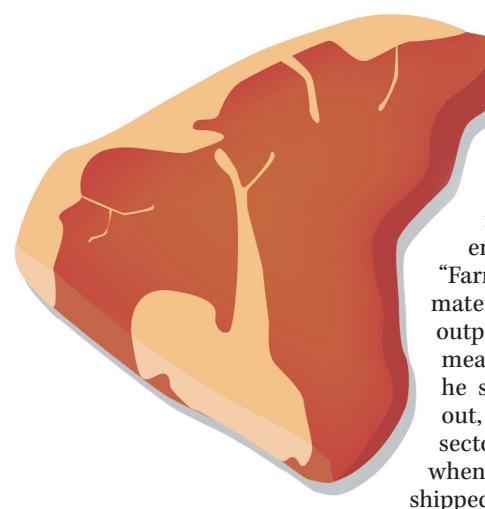
So you're in the supermarket, shopping for dinner. Should you choose beef or pork? And in the dairy section: Is whole milk better than semi-skimmed? You probably don't take the figures into account, but, according to one measure – your carbon footprint – Flemish beef is worse for the planet than Flemish pork, while there's barely any difference between whole and semi-skimmed milk. Those are among the conclusions of an important report produced by the research department of the agriculture and fisheries department of the government of Flanders, in association with Ghent University and the private consultancy Environment Resources Management (ERM). The report, one of the first of its

The carbon footprint of any activity is defined as the quantity of greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide, methane and nitrogen dioxide) produced by an organisation or activity, expressed in kilograms of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e). And since livestock farming (including dairy) makes up a large part of the carbon footprint of agriculture, the report concentrates on those three areas. The methodology is complex, and the purpose is ultimately not really to help shoppers but to analyse the factors that contribute to the carbon footprint so each can be tackled individually.

For example, the carbon footprint of a kilo of whole milk (1.02kg of CO₂e) is made up of methane produced by the cow's digestion (41%), feed brought in from outside (23%), manure (16%), production of feed crops on the farm (15.6%) and energy use (4.4%).

From this, researchers can see that it would be possible to reduce the footprint contributed by feed by growing it here. However, that is tinkering at the edges compared to the share contributed by the simple act of fermenting food in a cow's stomach. But even that can be reduced by, for example, a better mix of feed.

The use of more environmentally friendly feed is one of the aims of the feed manufacturers' association Befema. This includes a reduction of dependence on soy and an



beef

initiative, supported by the Flemish government, to replace imported soy with alternative proteins such as peas, clover and hemp.

Leading the field

Flanders is leading the field in producing such a detailed breakdown of agriculture's carbon footprint. "There is no general international standard for measuring carbon footprint, so we had to develop our own methodology," says Ellen Bracquené of ERM. "That has now put us in a position to develop a workable and transparent method for measuring the carbon footprint of Flanders' livestock industry." The farmers' union Boerenbond welcomed the report as "an indispensable policy instrument". According to Boerenbond president Piet Vanthemsche, the report "will

allow us to adapt the carbon footprint of agriculture where feasible".

However, he cautions against taking carbon footprint as the only measure of agriculture's environmental impact. "Farmers work with living materials, whose input and output are not perfectly measurable and controllable," he says. The study, he points out, is restricted to the primary sector – up to the moment when the raw milk or meat are shipped from the farm or the slaughterhouse.

"The rest of the food chain also has to make moves to limit the carbon footprint of foodstuffs." That would include, for example, the marketing of seasonal and local produce and a move by consumers away from processed foods.

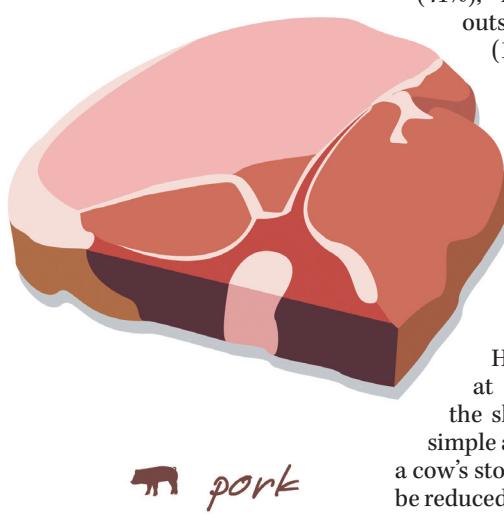
The elephant in the room in this discussion is this: We are consuming too many animal products in the first place. According to a study by the non-profit Ecolife, based in Leuven, if the whole world were to consume animal products (meat and fish, and to a lesser extent leather and wool) as Belgians do, that consumption would require three-quarters of the earth's productive surface to sustain it.

"We would immediately need the one-quarter remaining to plant trees to extract the CO₂ emissions of livestock farming and fisheries from the atmosphere," the study concludes. "There would be no space left over to live in or to produce other things like plant-based foods."

The Ecolife study looked at 8,000 data indicators of livestock farming, fishing and fish-farming, taking account not only of the carbon footprint but the whole environmental footprint of meat and fish in comparison to foods based on vegetables, soy, pulses, nuts and seeds and even seaweed. Animal-based foods, the study concludes, "require more energy, more land area, edible biomass and water. Further, animal farming produces more greenhouse and acid-producing gases. And then there is the question of over-fertilisation. A radical change in our food habits is urgently required."

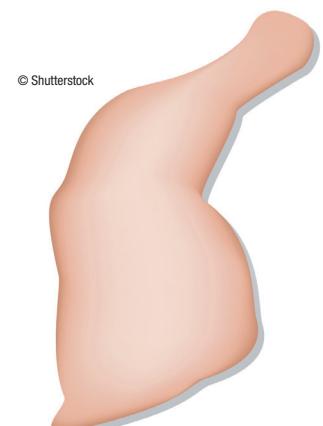
Footprint report
► www.tinyurl.com/carbonVL

Ecolife study
► www.ecolife.be



pork

kind in Europe, is a virtual map of the carbon footprint of Flemish agriculture in the three areas of beef, pork and milk.



poultry

Surge in popularity for root vegetables

They're known in culinary circles as "forgotten vegetables" and, ironically, they've probably never been more popular. A quick surf through the online menus of top dining establishments like Hof Van Cleve in Kruishoutem, Volt in Ghent and De Karmeliet in Bruges reveals that the current trend for the use of vegetables like turnip, parsley root, salsify, parsnip, purslane, Jerusalem artichoke, celeriac and beetroot shows no sign of abating.

Now these forgotten vegetables are on their way to your kitchen, and your work's canteen as well, after the students of Bruges hotel school Ter Groene Poorte (alumni: Dominique Persoone, Wout Bru, Roger Van Damme) got together with two West Flanders frozen foods manufacturers to produce recipes



Parsnip is an acquired taste but is currently immensely hip in the world of Flemish cuisine

that include the forgotten veggies, so they can be marketed to caterers. The vegetables in question are earthy, rustic varieties that fell out of favour when French cuisine was in its heyday, probably because they lacked the finesse required by fine-dining chefs. Father of modern French cuisine Auguste Escoffier makes no mention of kale or Jerusalem artichokes, while Elizabeth David reckoned the latter were little used because they are "tedious to peel". Her book of French provincial cookery mentions parsnips, beloved of the English, only as an addition to soup or bouillon. The French, it is said, considered them fit only for animals.

However, the trend towards more authentic, local and seasonal foods has seen a resurgence of forgotten vegetables by chefs like Peter

Goossens and his younger acolytes, like Kobe Desramaults of In De Wulf in Dranouter – whose menu this week includes *pompoen* (pumpkin), *rode biet* (beetroot), *knolselder* (celeriac), *schorseneren* (salsify), *pastinaak* (parsnip) and *aardpeer* (Jerusalem artichoke).

The partnership between Ter Groene Poorte and the frozen-food manufacturers Ardo and Fribona aims to ride that wave of popularity. "These are all products now considered delicacies but that fit in perfectly with large kitchens," says Christine Dhondt of Ter Groene Poorte. Recipes can be found on the websites of the two companies. AH

► www.ardo.com

► www.fribona.be

Fans of the fantastic feast once more

BIFFF celebrates 30 years of zombies, aliens, hobbits and vampires

Bjorn Gabriels

Even the undead age. This year the Brussels International Fantastic Film Festival (BIFFF) celebrates its 30th edition. No need to blow out the candles with a gurgling death rattle, though. The fest is very much alive, as it has built a strong reputation with fans of horror, fantasy and science fiction.

Ghouls from around the continent descend on Brussels next month to howl at the screens, dress up as their favourite monsters and demand that guests of honour sing, chant or just violate some popular tune when they come to present their films. Among the attendees requested to sing this year will be guests of honour William Friedkin and Barbara Steele. Friedkin, the award-winning director of *The French Connection*, *The Exorcist* and *Bug*, presents his latest, *Killer Joe*. Together with '60s mistress of mystery Steele, he will be knighted in the Order of the Raven, joining the likes of genre movie greats such as John Landis, Christopher Lloyd, Harry Kümel, Dario Argento and Luc Besson.

From the cradle...

Since its first edition in 1983, BIFFF has expanded in all directions. There are more films, more awards, more events, more guests. Over the years, audience numbers have doubled: from an already impressive number of 30,000 on BIFFF's maiden voyage to the phenomenal 60,000 in recent editions.

"In 1983, a group of genre fans decided to celebrate 60 years of fantastic film," explains Chris Orgelt, who has been working as a programmer for BIFFF since 1995 and has become a household name in the European festival sector. "They knew each other from the local youth and film clubs and had already organised concerts and the like. But they wanted to do something with these films that they all deeply loved. So they decided somewhat haphazardly to put together a film



A disagreeable video game character comes to life in Indian director Anubhav Sinha's *Ra.One*, screening this year at BIFFF

festival. One of them knew his way with language, so he dealt with the press; another one was more technologically skilled, so he would do the montage; and yet another one had a car to drive the guests around... Much to their surprise, the festival was a huge success."

All five founders of BIFFF are still very much involved, though now aided by 130 employees and 170 volunteers.

...to beyond the grave

The festival very soon came of age. A burgeoning video technology industry stimulated all kinds of genre and cult cinema. Yet most genre films were treated as if they posed a threat to the common good. In Britain, a number of low-budget horror films distributed on video cassette, the so-called "video nasties", were heavily criticised for their explicit depiction of violence and sexual content, or the combination of both. "For a long time, genre cinema was not being taken seriously," confirms Orgelt. "Even if filmmakers such as George Romero [*Night of the Living Dead*] had been dealing with

society's fears from the get-go. At the same time, a lot of fans succumbed to pigeonholing themselves. There were heated arguments and often hostile feuds between fans of different slasher movies."

But times change, of course. "Over the last 30 years, genre cinema has immensely popularised. Now you find them in every box office top five."

That must make programming easier for BIFFF? Sure, but "we are always on the look-out for new trends and films that think outside the box," answers Orgelt. "Our 7th Orbit Competition is meant for more challenging films. In recent years, we've also had films from South America that dealt with the political situation there through genre cinema. We always try to mix popular movies with more challenging ones."

In this year's international competition, BIFFF screens its first ever Cuban film, *Juan of the Dead*, which promises to be a zombie film that mixes Romero's political commentary with more recent ironic plays on the genre. Also new this year are 3D screenings. If you

like to combine your zombie attire with Elvis Costello-like glasses, Tsui Hark's *The Flying Swords of Dragon Gate*, with action star Jet Li, or the family-friendly animation *Dr Seuss' The Lorax* might be your best bets.

Sacred monsters

Looking back on 30 BIFFF editions, the festival can present an impressive track record of noteworthy filmmakers, who affiliated themselves with the festival early on in their careers. In 1984, David Cronenberg presented his then unreleased *Videodrome*, now a horror classic, thanks to programmes like BIFFF and word of mouth. Christopher Nolan – now known for revamping the Batman franchise – screened his debut *Following* here in 2000. Orgelt fondly remembers a young Peter Jackson, now one of the

most famous directors in the world, visiting the festival prior to his *Lord of the Rings* fame. "I can still see him, somewhat uneasily strolling around in his sandals during our Vampire Ball."

BIFFF justifiable prides itself on being one of the oldest fantastic film festivals in the world. As a founding member of the European Fantastic Film Festivals Federation (EFFFF), it continues to play an important role in providing a launching pad for genre cinema. True to its original goal, BIFFF aims to combine pleasure and (cheap) thrills with thought-provoking genre cinema. Over the years, BIFFF has propagated various cinematic waves. It supported the outburst of Japanese horror around the turn of the 21st century and welcomed the wave of Spanish genre films of a few years back, such as the ghostly *The Orphanage* and the reality-TV inspired *[REC]*.

In the near future, Orgelt expects a lot from the Scandinavian industry and sees a renewal of found footage cinema on the horizon. He also hopes to continue expanding: "I would really like to include games and interactive cinema in our festival. They cost a lot of money but are right up our audience's alley." After three decades, BIFFF maintains its firm focus on fan culture. A communal celebration of all things fantastic remains of the essence, including the programming outside the cinema. From its first edition, make-up artists were on the scene to paint your face and get you in the mood. Many events have followed, including the body-painting contest, the Vampire Ball and the infamous Zombie Parade, which brings the fantastic right into the heart of Brussels.

5-17 APRIL

Tour & Taxis, Brussels

► www.bifff.org

THE FANTASTIC FIVE



The Raven Opening film *The Raven* by James McTeigue (*V for Vendetta*) stars John Cusack as Edgar Allan Poe in an implausible fictionalisation of the master of the macabre's last days. Reception so far hasn't been friendly, but that will not stop BIFFF buffs from kick-starting this year's edition with howling pleasure.

La Chispa de la Vida (As Luck Would Have It) Spanish helmer Alex de la Iglesia (*Perfect Crime*) is a BIFFF stalwart. This satire of sensationalist society features Salma Hayek as a wife whose husband forms the centre of a media circus.

Calvaire (The Ordeal) Belgian filmmaker Fabrice du Welz's 2004 off-centre black comic horror film set in the Ardennes is one-third of a celebration of 30 years of local fantastic film. The other two are Raoul Servais' partially animated

Taxandria (1994) and Emmanuel Kervyn's tale of demon-possessed elders, *Rabid Grannies* (1988).

Zombie Parade On 7 April, zombies take over the capital in the form of BIFFF fans in often realistically frightening costumes. You, too, can take part – or just watch them shuffle by on the streets. Even Brussels' international symbol and little man for all touristic seasons, Manneken Pis, joins the festivities, transforming into Draculaken Pis for one day. Sending in a picture of you posing next to the young sprinkler might win you a free ticket to the Vampire Ball.

Vampire Ball BIFFF wouldn't be complete without its notorious Vampire Ball. On Friday the 13th (!), revellers feast once more to the break of dawn.

The ambivalence of anonymity

Elvis Peeters and the man with no conscience

Rebecca Benoot

Elvis Peeters is a genuine Renaissance man. Literature, poetry, music, theatre – you name it, he's done it. This month his new novel *Dinsdag* (Tuesday) appears in bookstores, followed by a children's book next month and a brand new CD by his band Aroma di Amore the month thereafter, complete with a concert in Brussels' Ancienne Belgique.

Perhaps it's only necessary, then, that all his novels are a co-production. He writes them together with his media-shy wife Nicole van Bael. It's a collaboration that has been going on for more than 20 years, though only Peeters' name appears on the cover.

"We both write a part, and then we rewrite each other's," Peeters (pictured) explains. "Then we usually sit in a coffee shop to discuss it."

The couple meets away from home because "things can get a little heated sometimes", says Peeters, "but we mainly talk about the characters, plotlines, that kind of thing, and we always make sure there's a consensus when it comes to the text. If we don't agree on something, it disappears in a drawer."

Love them or hate them, their novels usually offer up a bleak and often cynical portrait of society. The last novel, 2009's *Wij* (We), is about a group of teenagers whose boredom leads to several violent and perverse experiments. It was published with an "explicit content" label on the cover, lending a sense of Peeters being the Bret Easton Ellis of Flanders.

Dinsdag deals with a random day in the life of a 76-year-old man trying to elude a social worker who wants



© Stephan Vanfleteren

to put him into a retirement home.

He seems innocent enough and even stirs up some heartfelt compassion. Throughout the day, he reminisces about his life and the two women

his brief stint as a pilot.

"We wanted to write a novel about the generations that came before the one of the characters in *Wij*," Peeters says. "There were about four drafts

"The concept of only taking care of yourself isn't that appealing or viable in our society"

he once loved deeply, but also about the ones he raped and the people he killed during this stay in Congo and

that we didn't finish, but out of all of them, this character appealed to us the most, and his story developed

quite effortlessly." The unnamed character isn't pleasant, but he is intriguing. It was quite a challenge for the authors to walk in the footsteps of a man with no moral compass. "He doesn't care much about the world and the people around him," Peeters continues. "He just tries to get the most out of what life offers him, regardless of how he is perceived by others. He doesn't feel any responsibility towards society; he's an opportunist. But when it comes to his two lost loves, it's clear that he's still capable of emotion, although he did get a lot in return." Told with precision and genuine insight, *Dinsdag* is a novel that shows us that looks can be very deceiving. Peeters doesn't judge his character exactly, but there is razor-sharp social critique that emerges in the course of the storytelling on the individualisation and lack of solidarity in present-day society.

"We wanted to embody what happens if someone turns his back on society and is only interested in what he can get out of situations," explains Peeters. "He himself never takes any initiative. We tried to question his motivation, or lack thereof, because ultimately he ends up alone. So the concept of only taking care of yourself isn't that appealing or viable in contemporary society."

When it comes to Peeters' other work, such as poetry and songwriting, he prefers to go solo. "Literature may be the most weighty element, but I need the other things as well. I thrive on variety because when I'm working, I usually get ideas for other projects."

► www.elvispeeters.be

WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

DJ music festival Tomorrowland in Boom, Antwerp province, was named the **best music event in the world** at the International Dance Music Awards handed out in Miami last week. This year's edition takes place from 27 to 29 July. The pre-sale for Belgian customers – amounting to 40% of tickets available – sold out in one day last weekend. Everyone gets a chance at the rest of the tickets, which go on sale on Saturday, 7 April.

► www.tomorrowland.be

Angelina Jolie was seen in Amsterdam last week **buying a Mega Mindy costume**. The Flemish press had a field day with the news, which arrived complete with a photo of the superstar actress carrying the bright pink packaging around the store. "I hope she bought it for herself," commented Free Souffrau, the Flemish actress who portrays the superheroine Mega Mindy on TV, "to wear for Brad Pitt".

► www.megamindy.be

Jeroen Meus was the big winner of the annual **Flemish Television Stars awards**, which were presented at Ethias Arena in Hasselt and aired live last Saturday night. The chef of *Dagelijkse kost* won most popular TV personality, and the show won most popular programme and best lifestyle programme. Other winners were *Het Journaal* for best information programme, *Code 37* for best drama and *Tegen de sterren op* for best comedy.

► www.vlaamsetelevisieacademie.be

Electro-pop duo The Compact Disk Dummies won **Humo's Rock Rally**, the biennial competition that counts Das Pop, The Van Jets and The Hickey Underworld as past winners. The announcement was as much of a surprise to the underdog pair of teenage singers as much as to the audience, who nevertheless reacted enthusiastically. Canvas will air a documentary on this year's Rally next Sunday night, 1 April.

► www.humo.be/rock-rally

American director Susan Youssef's film *Habibi*, a contemporary adaptation of the tragic, ninth-century love poem "Majnun Layla", which she set in the Gaza strip, has **won the top prize at Bruges' Cinema Novo Film Festival**. Youssef has "given a centuries-old tale of forbidden love both a poetic and urgent modern interpretation," said the jury. In other film news, the director of Oscar-nominated *Rundskop*, Michael R Roskam, has been chosen to sit on the Cannes Film Festival's Chopard Trophy Jury, which selects emerging acting talent. Finally, Flemish director Bavo Defurne's *Noordzee, Texas* has been selected as the closing film of the prestigious London Gay & Lesbian Film Festival on 6 April.

FRESH FICTION

Haar bloed (Her Blood)

by Kristien Hemmerechts • De Geus

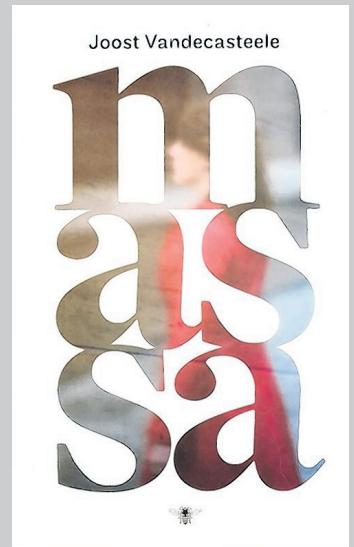
In Flemish author Kristien Hemmerechts' latest novel a man named Titus has been fascinated by blood for his entire life. He is studying to become a doctor when he meets the lovely Roos, a girl he has to share with his best friend Pieter, until she suddenly falls ill to a mysterious disease. Hemmerechts has produced more than 20 novels, and whatever the topic, she does so with a trademark flair. Cleverly constructed, thrilling and moving, *Haar bloed* proves why she is still the queen of Flemish fiction.

Massa (Mass)

by Joost Vandecasteele • De Bezige Bij

Flemish author (and stand-up comic) Joost Vandecasteele's third novel is as contemporary as

it gets. Filled with references to the economic crisis, the troubles in the Middle East and brief jabs at WikiLeaks, this hilarious and original book full of quirky characters tells the story of young Margot, who gets a job at Blurred



Inc, where she has to fabricate stories that keep the inner workings of the corporate world running smoothly. Vandecasteele wanted to portray our chaotic universe anno 2012, and the result is a joyride that will blow you away.

De allerlaatste caracara ter wereld (The Last Caracara in the World)

by Peter Verhelst • Prometheus

Known for his surrealism and fairy-tale atmospheres, award-winning Flemish author Peter Verhelst's latest novel is as magical as ever. Victor is a doctor on a small tropical island. When local woman Cassandra turns her back on the Island after having lost the man she loves, women start to wash ashore. It soon becomes clear that Victor's arrival many

years ago wasn't a coincidence. *De allerlaatste caracara ter wereld* is a quick and hugely satisfying read and makes a great introduction to this celebrated author's eclectic oeuvre.

De Brooklynclub

by Bart Koubaa • Querido

In the 1960s, four friends create the Brooklyn Club in an abandoned warehouse on New York's East River, where they organise fights. When estate agent Mayer rapes the girlfriend of one of the founders, this once glorious brotherhood starts to crumble. Forty years later, Mayer's body is found, proving that revenge can strike when you least expect it. Although Flemish author and photographer Koubaa's new novel is slightly reminiscent of *Fight Club*, it's a complex tale told out of sequence that will have you guessing until the very end.

Uncomfortable and contentious Contour on Tour

Bjorn Gabriel

We live in a flurry of images. Technology allows movement to pop up on every imaginable surface. Yet much meaning and sensitivity is lost in this projection mania. *Contour on Tour*, an overview of Flemish video art of the last decade, wants to counterbalance this tendency. Together, the 12 works, selected by Contour Mechelen, offer an opportunity to reflect on an omnipresent image culture, which is only seemingly clear-cut, and to once again encounter the diverse potential of the moving image. "Each work is in some sense critical," says curator Hans Martens. Last year, the Flemish Culture Prize for Visual Arts was awarded to the artist duo Jos De Gruyter and Harald Thys. Flemish minister for culture Joke Schauvliege called their work "anything but classical or comfortable, but that makes it more interesting. Art can and should sometimes be uncomfortable and contentious."

Martens equally stresses the critical

role (video) art plays: "When artists use certain techniques or materials, there's always a critical dimension with respect to the 'mainstream use'. Art is always a bit contentious or against the flow." Martens points to television, with its strict codes and rigid formats. "While the television industry was looking for the perfect image, the artist sought to destroy or deconstruct that image." "Gargles from Ipanema" by Dennis Tyfus does precisely that. An older woman dances seductively, exposing the clichés surrounding the depiction of female beauty. These images were shown at Mechelen's Nekkerspoel train station during Contour's Biennale of the Moving Image last year but were removed by the NMBS a few days before the end of the exhibition following complaints from passengers. Until 11 July (hopefully) Tyfus' work



© Hans Op de Beeck, "Staging Silence" (2009)

will be shown on the facade of De Loketten. Passersby can also see David Claerbout's "Homeless Cat", which frames a cat and a city view in a combination of everyday triviality and high-tech representation. His installation is synchronised with the day and night cycle and the actual

weather conditions. Inside, Michaël Borremans – mostly known as a painter – references the often-required sponsor logo by incorporating the logo of his sponsor, the Flemish government. In "Weight" (2005), a slowly rotating, statuesque girl wears a knitted

sweater with two Flemish lions.

In his two powerful documentary portraits *Johan* and *François*, Sven Augustijnen examines the interview format while giving an apt depiction of the language problems suffered by two patients with memory loss.

Contour on Tour also includes the beautiful installation with multiple screens "Ash Tree" by Sarah Vanagt, a critique on the commercialisation of art spaces by Katrien Vermeir and Ronny Heiremans and works from Nicolas Provost, Bart Stolle, Wim Catrysse, Anouk De Clercq and Hans Op de Beeck (pictured).

Plenty to see and hear, but with one screechingly false note: muzak. The tedious musical backdrop in De Loketten intrudes on some of the works, which seems rather counterproductive for an exhibition that aims to challenge the intrusive banality that infests our culture.

Until 11 July | De Loketten, Flemish Parliament, IJzerenstraat 99, Brussels

► www.tinyurl.com/deloketten

CONCERT

Hooverphonic with orchestra

Nobody would believe Hooverphonic's lead singer Geike Arnaert could ever be replaced, but she has been, and the new singer is good, really good. Noémie Wolfs carries the torch for the Flemish trip hop group that's enjoyed worldwide success for 15 years. The recent release of the album *Hooverphonic with Orchestra* was followed by six sold-out shows at Antwerp's Elisabethzaal. The smooth, sultry electro-pop sound of Hooverphonic combined with the majestic backing of a 62-head symphony orchestra is obviously a winning combination. This autumn, the group led by bassist Alex Callier will most certainly sell out the Sportpaleis. So get your tickets now for what promises to be a legendary show. **Robyn Boyle**



26 October, 20.00 | Sportpaleis, Antwerp

► www.sportpaleis.be

MORE CONCERTS THIS WEEK

Bruges

Das Pop: Ghent's famous indie pop group
MAR 31 20.30 at Markt
► www.bruggeplus.be

Brussels

London Noise: Brit-pop/rock experimental night featuring Action Beat, Pulpo, Duke of Zuke and more
APR 1 18.00 at Magasin 4, Havenlaan 51
► www.magasin4.be

Therapy?: Alternative hard rock from Northern Ireland
APR 3 20.00 at Ancienne Belgique, Anspachlaan 110
► www.abconcerts.be

EXHIBITION

'21': 21 years of cultural posters

Kwintessens magazine is turning 21. The quarterly following Flemish design and fashion offers a "kaleidoscopic image of graphic design in Flanders over the last two decades," according to artist Hugo Puttaert. The two institutions behind the publication, Design Flanders and the Flanders Fashion Institute, are celebrating the anniversary with this unique exhibition, in which 21 graphic designers each developed a poster. The cultural posters cover the same span of 21 years, with all the events and evolutions therein. The result is indeed kaleidoscopic: colourful and appealing, a reflection of the kind of high-level graphic design talent on hand in Flanders. **RB**



Until 15 April | Design Flanders Gallery, Brussels

► www.designflanders.be

MORE EXHIBITIONS THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Living Fashion: Women's Daily Wear 1750-1950: Historical exhibition on the influence of fashion on the everyday lives of middle-class women in Western Europe over the span of two centuries

Until AUG 12 at MoMu, Nationalestraat 28

► www.momu.be

Brussels

Daan van Golden: Apperception: Retrospective of the Dutch artist's work spanning more than five decades, an example of contemporary painting that challenges the viewer to see the extraordinary in the ordinary

Until APR 29 at Wiels, Van Volxemlaan 354

► www.wiels.org

Present!: Multi-disciplinary show of 30 artists present on the international art scene, all of whom graduated from the Royal Brussels Academy of Fine Arts

Until APR 22 at De Elektriciteitscentrale, Sint-Katelijneplein 44

► www.deelektriciteitscentrale.be

FOOD & DRINK

Hop shoots in Poperinge

Nowhere in the world do farmers produce so many hop shoots as in Poperinge. The West Flemish town has always been known for its hop fields and hoppy beers. But now it's also gaining a reputation as one of the only places in the world where chefs incorporate the young, tender shoots – often referred to as "white gold" – of the hop plant into their menus. The season is now, so Poperinge's tourism office, hotels, bed and breakfasts and restaurants are all running full speed to accommodate interest.

You can, for example, opt for the full "hop shoot arrangement". Starting from €66 per person, this includes an early morning visit to a hop farm to see how the shoots are harvested, followed by a local beer tasting and a tour through hop country. Then you'll be treated to a hop shoot tasting menu in a Poperinge restaurant. The menu includes: salad with raw hop shoots and hazelnut oil vinaigrette, baked sole served with Watou's Witbier, roast suckling pig prepared in St Bernardus Prior beer, creamy hop shoots and spinach *stoemp*, plus a surprise dessert. Afterwards, you'll have a chance to walk off those calories with a visit downtown and a guided tour of the Hop Museum, without forgetting the nightcap. RB



Until 15 April | Across Poperinge

► www.hopscheuten.be

MORE FOOD & DRINK THIS WEEK

Brussels

Chez Cinematek: On the occasion of Brusselicious 2012, Cinematek combines food-related film screenings with tastings; this week's featured film is *Woman on Top*

MAR 29 19.00 at Cinematek, Hortastraat 9

► www.brusselicious.be

Haspengouw region

Rundskoproute: Take a Vespa ride along the spots where Oscar-nominated film *Rundskop* was shot, including arrangements with lunch or dinner and lodging

From APR 1 at Poms, Ambachtslaan 3226, Sint-Truiden

► www.poms.be

FILM

Allez, Eddy!

There is arguably no 20th-century Belgian more famous than Eddy Merckx, a cyclist who's gone down in history for reaching speeds no one thought possible and won the Tour de France five times in the late 1960s and early '70s. Merckx was a star across the world, and one of the few cyclists who attained household-name status, even among those who didn't follow cycling. It's curious why no film director in Belgium has ever made a documentary or feature about the man who won the equivalent of a race a week for six years.

It's quite a coincidence, then, that this week two films are being released that use Merckx mania as a backdrop to their stories. And they both begin with a similar premise: Matthieu Donck's French-language *Torpedo* finds a down-on-his-luck loner winning a contest to meet Eddy, while Flemish director Gert Embrechts' *Allez, Eddy!* finds the 11-year-old Freddy hoping to win a local race that will not only grant him access to his hero, but the chance to enter a prestigious training institution for cyclists.

Unfortunately, in the case of Freddy – a name very similar to Eddy, he often notes – a physical anomaly (involving the bowels – mortifying) has kept him at home in his unnamed provincial village for most of his life. His overprotective mother (Barbara Sarafian) warns him that "people don't like children who are different", so instead of going outside to cycle, Freddy (Jelte Blommaert) furiously pedals a bike hanging by ropes from the ceiling of his attic bedroom.

One day a big chain grocery store sets up in the village, which alarms and excites the residents in equal measure. Freddy's father, a fourth-generation butcher, joins the anti-grocery store crowd, which gains nationalist momentum when it is discovered that the store is run by – gasp! – French speakers. Unfortunately for Freddy, it's this store that is sponsoring the contest he is determined to win. (Freddy wouldn't care if the store was run by the devil himself, as long as he gets to meet Eddy Merckx.)

Allez Eddy! is a simple, charming comedy that is elevated from commonplace through excellent performances by Sarafian – who is always perfect, whether she is happy or angry or a little drunk, all of which she gets to be here – and by Peter Van Den Begin as Freddy's father, an average 1970s dad, out of touch with his kids and torn between tradition and the demands of a quickly changing world. Lisa Bradshaw



From 28 March | Across Flanders | ► www.allezeddy.be

MORE FILM THIS WEEK

Brussels

Akira Kurosawa cycle: Three films by the master of Japanese cinema, whose epic tales of love, honour and war have influenced filmmakers from Sergio Leone to Steven Spielberg

Until APR 29 at Flagey, Heilig Kruisplein

► www.flagey.be

Leuven

Afrika Film Festival: Films from across the African continent, plus special guests and awards

Until MAR 31 across Leuven

► www.afrikafilmfestival.be

CAFÉ SPOTLIGHT

John Rega

Gainsbar

Vlaamse Markt 1, Kortrijk

There is a corner of Kortrijk with a friendly ambiance and top-notch beers – but the music may be a bit monotonous for some people. It could go either way, as the playlist is dedicated to Serge Gainsbourg, the late French singer who crooned (or murmured) his way through most of the popular music styles available over the five decades he spanned.

Gainsbar has for two-and-a-half years been spinning the man's discography and serving many of West Flanders' finest ales, on one of the centre city's nicest pedestrianised squares. You might stumble across another pub dedicated to Gainsbourg before you find another with a beer list as well chosen.

More than 100 choices, including a few unusually on draft, cover vintage Trappists and the range of Belgian hues, from traditional gueuzes to tart red ales to powerful stouts. There is even a Gruut, Ghent's mediaeval revival spiced with herbs but not the bitter-infusing hops that have been standard to the definition of "beer" for centuries. Other specials flit on and off the lists chalked onto the walls.

Offerings are mostly organised by style, with a few sections featuring area brewers, including Struise and Alvinne. Entries are presented with a pithy line of description, the better for comparative tastings. There are some 75cl bottles for yet more conviviality.

The only let-down to the legacy of Gainsbourg could be the decor. There's nothing remotely disreputable or louche about the place, unless you listen to the lyrics or if you count an off-colour cartoon on its website. You would expect at least a well-smoked-in feel.

Not so. Behind a clean-lined townhouse in fashionable slate grey – think Gainsbourg's mane, mid-career – you find a well-lit, generously spaced cafe. The soundtrack is retro, but the environs are up-to-the-minute with a pixelated pattern of colourful squares cladding the floor and the bar. The relaxed, contemporary feel

extends to the tables under the trees outside. Bring a friend, explore new beers, maybe sing a duet.

► www.gainsbar.org



BITE

Trattoria della Mamma ★★★★

I thought another Italian restaurant was the last thing Ghent needed. But as soon as my friends and I entered Trattoria della Mamma, we knew this place was different.

For starters, you come in via a long glass counter full of the most gorgeous array of cheeses, cured meats and yellow pots filled with antipasti such as mixed olives, mushrooms, courgette and artichokes bathed in olive oil. Then there are several trays of prepared dishes ready for take-away, including spinach and ricotta cannelloni smothered in tomato sauce and heaps of tagliolini with pesto.

Against the wall are floor-to-ceiling shelves of Italian products that make great gifts, from pastas and sauces to prosecco and liqueurs. The whole shop aspect of the trattoria makes sense after I find out that owner Ann Booy's husband works at nearby ItalFoods, the importer and distributor of Italian specialities that supplies the great majority of Italian restaurants in the area.

But we're here to sit down to lunch, so our friendly – and seemingly Italian – server shows us the way. He takes his time to explain the menu choices, in English, which are four very tempting dishes. These are written on a large chalkboard on the wall, as they change every day.

The first is *taglioline all'arrabbiata*, thin strands of pasta in a spicy tomato sauce. The second dish makes the choice easy for me: *orecchiette con carciofi e gorgonzola*. Orecchiette pasta gets its name from the Italian for "little ears" because of its shape. The small dent in the middle of each round of pasta is perfect for collecting sauce. These are mixed with

artichokes and gorgonzola, a blue cheese from northern Italy. Third on the list is *fiocchi formaggio e pere con pepe verde*, a unique combination of cheese and pear stuffed inside little pasta purses in a green pepper sauce. Finally, our fourth option is rocket salad tossed with prosciutto, parmesan and pine nuts. Our table winds up sporting two orders of orecchiette and one fiocchi.

The dishes arrive quickly enough, but before they do we have time to enjoy a glass of red wine and sparkling water and some very fresh, crusty bread dipped in high-quality virgin olive oil. They also bring a dish of garlicky green and black olives, a nice touch.

In all honesty, I haven't had pasta this good since I stopped off at an osteria in small-town Tuscany. The pasta is fresh, perfectly al dente and a joy to eat. The gorgonzola sauce is earthy and nutty, the artichoke hearts are tangy, and the shallots pink and sweet.

The fiocchi are equally delicious. Not only is it a pleasure to bite into fresh pasta that has been twisted into little packages, but they are filled with an infallible combination of sweet pear and salty cheese. The balls of green pepper in the sauce add a subtle bite to the dish. (Our friend's plate is so clean after she's finished that they hardly need to wash it.) Dessert is – what else? – a round of fine, strong Italian espressos and a big, amaretto-drenched slice of tiramisu to share. The bill comes to less than €20 each.

► www.trattoriadellamamma.be



© Robyn Boyle

→ Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 36, Ghent; 09.234.17.01

⌚ Mon, 11.30-18.30; Tue-Sat, 10.00-18.30

€ €9.50-€13.50

ⓘ A real Italian trattoria offering fresh pasta, four dishes daily and an artisanal delicatessen and shop

TALKING DUTCH

Er is een tijd van komen en er is een tijd van gaan

So goes a popular saying in Dutch used to announce one's departure without having to go into details. There is a time of arriving and a time of leaving. *En de tijd van gaan is voor mij gekomen*. And the time of leaving has come for me.

I wrote my first Talking Dutch column a little over a year ago. Since then, I've very much enjoyed sitting down every two weeks to try and shed some light on the many shadowy corners of the Dutch language. I hope you've enjoyed reading and, more importantly, have learned something here and there. *Maar aan alle goede dingen komt een einde*, all good things come to an end. This, dear readers, is the last time I'll pen this column.

Like in English, there are many ways to say goodbye.

Most common is *dag*. It actually means "day", which immediately betrays its provenance. At some point, it separated from *goedendag*, or good day, to stand on its own. An old English gentleman may still wish you a "good day, sir" (or madam) upon departure.

Equally commonplace is *tot ziens*, meaning "see you later", very much like the French *au revoir* and German *auf Wiedersehen*. People often use it, even when the chances of seeing each other again are slim.

More popular is the French-originated *salut*. It is a very Flemish thing to say (as opposed to Dutch from the Netherlands) and often becomes cute and plural: *salukes*.

But there is little doubt that the most dramatic of them all is

vaarwel. It implies some form of definitiveness, which, I'd say, really makes it more honest than *tot ziens*. Still, people don't use it often – I think out of a fear of being frank to the point of rude.

But I think the word is beautiful for a number of reasons. One, it is a compound (remember those?). It is made up of the imperative *vaar* from the verb *varen*, to sail, and *wel*, the adverb of good. Farewell.

Also, it reminds us of the age of seafarers brave and fearless, who boldly went where no man had ever gone before. (Or was that *Star Trek*?)

So, there it is. *Vaarwel* to all of you. *Veel dank* for all who have written and asked questions and, most of all, simply read the column. *Dag!*

Philip Ebels

The last word...

On the road

"I realise that this was an unbelievably stupid accident."

Trucker Hugo Wijsmans suffered a broken thigh and hip when he was run over by his own truck's detached wheel

Time for action

"A decision about summer time has to be taken within the EU."

EU Commissioner Karel De Gucht, as opponents of the lost hour start gathering one million signatures to have the law changed

Unreal estate

"A man with a loft finally bought the bear for €6,500, to put in his son's bedroom."

The sale of stock from Walter Van Beirendonck's showroom included a huge plastic bear, 2.8m wide

Last supper?

"We're losing our identity. We have to put our classic dishes back on the menu, and show off those things we're rightly proud of. If we don't value our Belgian cuisine right now, in five years it'll be too late."

Pierre Wynants, the doyen of Belgian chefs, sounds an alarm bell

NEXT WEEK
IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

A Ghent University lab is home to the latest in stem-cell research, as proved by a paper just published in the journal *Nature Biotechnology*. We meet the scientist behind the developments and discuss the most recent discoveries and moral questions involved

Living

Two Flemings recently got a taste of life on Mars during a space simulation in the remote plains of Utah. Science correspondent Andy Furniere talks to the members of the Flemish chapter of the Mars Society about what they learned from the out-of-this-world experience

Arts

We explore the nature, heritage and varied landscape of the Zwin border region thanks to a new 50-kilometre network of paths that's just opened in the nature reserve in Knokke-Heist

