

Township Enterprise

Aalst is Flanders' "most enterprising city"

► 5



Cross-country

The Zwin's new paths cross borders

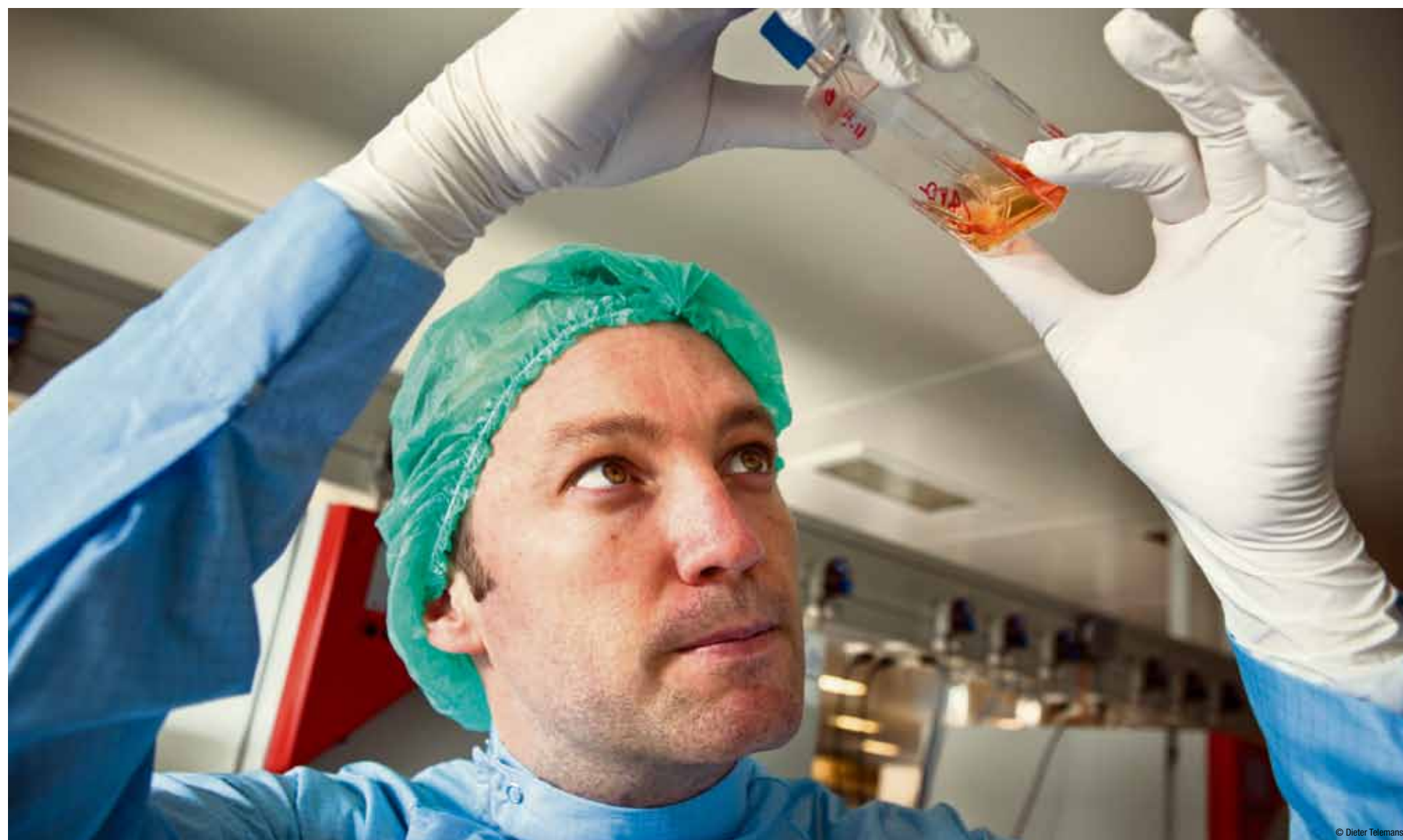
► 9



Drawing jazz

Philip Paquet and Graphicology

► 12



Cracking the code

A researcher in Ghent has put Flanders in the scientific spotlight with the discovery of a new stage in the production of stem cells

Courtney Davis

hESC. ICSI. IVF. PICMI. PGD. To the layman, trying to read an article in a scientific journal is like breaking a code, with jargon and acronyms that make it a language all its own. A recent paper published in *Nature Biotechnology* was no exception, so we went to the source to find out exactly why this article on stem cells from a researcher at Ghent University is making waves.

An American researcher at Ghent University, Thomas O'Leary (*pictured*) is in the final stages of completing his PhD, which focuses on the origins of human stem cells, looking into the process of how they are created in embryos. "Until now, everyone thought that human embryonic

stem cells were generated directly from the inner cell mass of the embryo," he explains. "Our paper reveals that the inner cell mass transforms *in vitro* before the stem cells arrive. Essentially, we've discovered a new stage." The article "Tracking the progression of the human inner cell mass during embryonic stem cell derivation" was recently published in *Nature Biotechnology*, one of the most widely read and influential scientific journals in the world. This research, done in collaboration with Leiden University Medical Centre in the Netherlands, is indicative of the university's scientific aspirations. Professor Petra De Sutter, head of the Department for Reproductive Medicine at Ghent University Hospital, has every intention of continuing to aim high. "From an infertility

treatment perspective, our long-term goal would be to create gametes [an egg or sperm] *in vitro* so these infertile couples could have a child with their own genetic make-up." Curing infertility is one of many dream scenarios posed by stem cells, an area of research that has captured the imagination of scientists and the public alike. Whether it's a spinal cord injury that has left someone paralysed or a debilitating degenerative disease like Parkinson's, stem cell research has instilled a hope so strong it's nearly tangible. Stem cell research is complex and multi-layered. "Stem cells have two unique traits," explains O'Leary. "One is self-renewal, so they can be grown in culture indefinitely. The second trait is pluripotency, which means they can be directed to differentiate or to develop into any of the adult cell types in the body,

FACE OF FLANDERS

Anja Otte



Andrea Van de Castele

Andrea Van de Castele has become an unlikely celebrity. The 88-year-old features in a YouTube clip called “Grootmoeder uit haar kritiek over Jeroen Meus” that has gone viral like mad. From her living room, Andrea talks about the popular Flemish TV chef Jeroen Meus, whose cooking skills do not impress her in the least: “He puts savoy cabbage in the pan with streaky bacon, with no potatoes at all! I wouldn’t touch the stuff.” She then proceeds to explain just how savoy *stoemp* should be made. “Add salt, pepper and some nutmeg. Anyone can do it.” The clip is part of a larger documentary, in which Andrea talks about her life and times in Zwalm, a rural East-Flemish region, population 7,000, containing poetic sounding villages such as Beerlegem, Dikkele, Nederzwalm-Hermelgem, Paulatem and Sint-Blasius-Boekel. From her childhood, she remembers the wooden clogs she wore to school. Her wedding was held in her parents’ house, a pig killed for the occasion. Her husband was a bricklayer, and Andrea owned a shop, taxi firm and reception hall. “All of our money went to the taxman, as we declared all our income,” she says. “We didn’t know any better then.” In her entire life, she went on

exactly one holiday: to Lourdes, France, in the family car, packed up with food and drink to last the full three days. “Once we got there, we never dared to leave the car, for fear of it being stolen.” Andrea’s story is just one of 20 interviews with people of her generation, filmed for the Cinema Pax project: bakers, farmers, shop and pub keepers, a teacher, a priest and - typical of Zwalm - mill workers. Some speak nostalgically of the past, others remember the many hardships. Cinema Pax is a co-production of the town of Zwalm and the social-artistic organisation Victory Deluxe. “We bring together artists and ordinary people for performances or documentaries”, says Koen Cannoot of the organisation. “Cinema Pax, named after a former cinema in Zwalm, is essentially heritage material. We are very happy with the result, as all the participants, who live quite isolated lives, met afterwards, and some keep in touch now. We showed how everyone has something interesting to tell, each in their own way.” Andrea, meanwhile, who is protected from the media by Cinema Pax, remains largely unaware of the star she has become.

► www.cinemapax.be

News in brief

Last week detectives investigating last month’s **fatal bus crash in Sierre, Switzerland**, in which 28 people were killed, 22 of them schoolchildren, visited Toptours, the coach company whose bus was involved in the accident. The investigators also spoke with crash survivors from the Sint-Lambertus school in Heverlee. The team had planned to interview children from the school in Lommel, but parents of the seven survivors declined to give permission.

The Vooruit arts centre in Ghent has been awarded this year’s **Culture Prize for Management** for its Yesplan, an event-planning software package developed in-house and marketed by a spin-off of the centre. The centre also becomes the only institution ever to win two Culture Prizes, having won for General Cultural Services in 2007.

► www.cultuurprijsen.be

Police in Ghent are ready to repeat an experiment that saw **four police officers from Bulgaria** working with local police to raise confidence in the police service among the city’s large 10,000-strong Bulgarian community. The four Bulgarian officers ended their one-month stay in the city last week.

The ombudsman service of the Flemish government has called for a **single complaints procedure for the whole region**, including complaints regarding other administrative services. Last year the ombudsman received more than 53,500 complaints, of which only one in four were related to Flemish government services. The rest were passed along to the service concerned. “Things could be done more efficiently” with a single reporting point for all, ombudsman Bart Weekers said.

► www.vlaamseombudsdienst.be

Bakkerij De Connaisseur in the Antwerp district of Hoboken has

been chosen as this year’s **friendliest neighbourhood shop** in the city’s Gouden Glimlach (Golden Smile) competition. The bakery, which has only been open for two years, will receive a street party and an advertising campaign paid for by the city. The award was decided by the votes of residents.

► www.degoudenglimlach.be

The Brussels-Capital Region government has approved the **renovation of the Leopold II tunnel**, the longest tunnel in the country at 2.5 kilometres. The project will begin in 2014 and take a maximum of three years. The tunnel will remain open during works, to limit disruption to the 65,000 motorists who use it daily.

Walkers in a nature reserve near Ypres in West Flanders have spotted a very **rare raccoon dog** (*Nyctereutes procyonoides*), so-called because of its resemblance to the raccoon. The species, a member of the dog family, is native to East Asia. The sighting was reported to the Institute for Nature and Forest Research, and the beast was photographed, but all trace has since been lost. A previous reported sighting near Leuven could not be confirmed.

The **Field Liberation Movement**, which took part in a demonstration in Wetteren last May against genetically modified crops, has announced it plans a “peaceful action” in Zwijnaarde, a district of Ghent, in May, to protest the cultivation of experimental crops by the Flemish Institute for Biotechnology (VIB) and the University of Ghent. The protest is planned for 9 May, the day after 11 activists go on trial for injuries and damage caused at last year’s action.

Siebe Geerits, 11 from Bocholt in Limburg, is **Flanders’ first Junior Masterchef**, after emerging victorious

from last week’s final struggle against 12-year-old Hester from Wevelgem in West Flanders. Siebe’s ambition is now to complete primary school before going on to study at hotel school to follow in the footsteps of his heroes Peter Goossens and Sergio Herman.

► www.vtm.be/junior-masterchef

The **best language education in Flanders** comes from the University College of Brussels, according to a report compiled by expert inspectors in applied language learning. The college, now based in central Brussels, topped the list of higher education establishments for applied languages, translation, interpretation, multilingual communications and journalism.

► www.hubrusssel.be

One Flemish contestant made the cut for this year’s **Queen Elisabeth Music competition for violinists**. This is the third time that Jolente De Maeyer, 28, has taken part in the competition. The largest national contingent among the 88 young violinists accepted to compete in the prestigious competition comes from Korea, with 15, followed by the United States with 13, including four with dual Belgian-American nationality. This year marks the competition’s 75th anniversary.

► www.cmireb.be

A technology spin-off from the University of Leuven, Soundtalks, has developed a way to prevent **unnecessary use of antibiotics** by pig farmers, the university announced. Soundtalks uses microphones installed in the pigs’ stalls to pick up and analyse the sound of coughing so that farmers can administer antibiotics only to those pigs showing signs of infection. The first operational system was due to be installed this week on a farm in the south of the Netherlands.

► www.soundtalks.be

FLANDERS TODAY

Flanders Today, a free weekly English-language newspaper, is an initiative of the Flemish Region and is financially supported by the Flemish authorities.



The logo and the name Flanders Today belong to the Flemish Region (Benelux Beeldmerk nr 815.088). The editorial team of Flanders Today has full editorial autonomy regarding the content of the newspaper and is responsible for all content, as stipulated in the agreement between Corelio Publishing and the Flemish authorities.

EDITOR Lisa Bradshaw
DEPUTY EDITOR Sally Tipper
NEWS EDITOR Alan Hope
AGENDA EDITOR Robyn Boyle
ART DIRECTOR Paul Van Dooren
PREPRESS Corelio AdPro
CONTRIBUTORS Daan Bauwens, Rebecca Benoot, Robyn Boyle, Leo Cendrowicz, Sabine Clappaert, Courtney Davis, Katy Desmond, PM Doutreligne, Nicholas Hirst, Stéphanie Duval, Andy Furniere, Anna Jenkinson, Catherine Kosters, Katrien Lindemans, Marc Maes, Ian Mundell, Anja Otte, Tom Peeters, Marcel Schoeters, Christophe Verbiest, Denzil Walton
GENERAL MANAGER Joske Plas
PUBLISHER Corelio Publishing NV

EDITORIAL ADDRESS
Gossetlaan 30 - 1702 Groot-Bijgaarden
tel. 02 373 99 09 - fax 02 375 98 22
editorial@flanderstoday.eu

FREE SUBSCRIPTIONS
subscriptions@flanderstoday.eu
or sign up online at www.flanderstoday.eu

ADVERTISING
Evelyn Fregonese
02 373 83 57
advertising@flanderstoday.eu

VERANTWOORDELIJKE UITGEVER
Joske Plas

OFFSIDE

Alan Hope

Wanted: cobblestones

There are some things money just can’t buy, so they say. But the authorities in Qatar are trying to prove that wrong. According to a report on a local news website, Qatar is in the market for authentic cobblestones from the Pajottenland. Why? So they can build authentic cobblestone roads for cyclists to race on, in an effort to replicate that certain something that makes Flanders one of the top cycling regions on the planet. Qatar is the richest country in the world, largely because of an estimated 25 billion barrels of oil and 25 trillion cubic metres of natural gas. It has negligible unemployment and little poverty, but, needless to say, no cobbled streets. Pajottenland does have those, in abundance. Situated in the south-west of Flemish Brabant and part

of East Flanders, the area’s rolling landscape lends itself to cycle racing, the perfect place to put riders through their paces. Last weekend’s Ronde van Vlaanderen is the most important of these, and long stretches of the race are run over cobbled roads. Qatar also has its own *ronde*, the Tour of Qatar. The website Editiepajot last week reported that Qatari officials have been scouting for cobblestones in Dworp, Sint-Pieters-Leeuw and Halle. Offside found dozens of small ads on various Flemish sites offering cobblestones for sale, at prices ranging from €200 for an 18-metre driveway to €1,750 for 90 metres of Napoleonhead stones. Not that money is an object, of course, but it does appear that the Qataris will have to drive over and pick the stones up themselves.



Cracking the code

A supportive legal system and active in vitro fertilisation programmes have put Flanders at the top of stem cell research

► continued from page 1

such as heart or liver cells. This is interesting for scientific research because it makes them applicable to all biological fields."

For instance, if you are studying the lung, says O'Leary, "you can take stem cells and drive them to become lung cells, instead of working with a live organism, such as an animal or human. Right now, there is a US company differentiating stem cells into retinal cells. These are cells of the eye. Their work is showing promise for treating macular degeneration. In other words, this is a clinical trial for curing a type of blindness."

Yet for all its promise, there is a shroud of mystery and serious concerns about ethics tied to this topic. Stem cells are, after all, harvested from human embryos.

Kinds of stem cells and where they come from

There are a few ways of obtaining stem cells. There are adult stem cells (such as Hematopoietic, found in bone marrow), but once these cells have a lineage, this is the only purpose or direction they can have. While they can still self-renew, they no longer have pluripotency.

There are induced pluripotency stem cells (iPSC), which are artificially derived by forcing non-pluripotent cells to become like human embryonic stem cells (hESC). While they show a lot of promise, iPSC are only trying to be like hESC, but are not yet an exact match. This could be the future of stem cell research as the field develops, but, for now, hESC are the gold standard.

Most embryonic stem cells used for research are obtained from embryos that have developed from eggs

fertilised in a lab *in vitro*. A strong *in vitro* fertilisation programme in Flanders is the source of many donated embryos. Stem cell extraction is only done with full consent of the donors.

Opinions – both from members of the public and from couples undergoing treatment (a major source of egg donations) – are divided depending on how people see embryos, says professor De Sutter. "If it's a miniature child, then they can't allow the research. If it's a clump of cells without any potential, then research is fine. That is the core of the discussion."

Professor Karen D Sermon, head of the Department of Embryology and Genetics at the Free University of Brussels (VUB), says she "wouldn't be doing this if my thoughts weren't clear. Is it ethical to use eight or 100 cells, or clumps of cells, for research for the betterment of patients and their children? I've been working with human embryos and hESC from the first day of my PhD. It is not a person and doesn't have the same rights as a person."

Legal restrictions and ethical committees

Professor Catherine Verfaillie, head of the Stem Cell Institute at the University of Leuven (KUL), which uses embryonic stem cells but doesn't create them, says the decision to not make embryonic stem cells has to do with logistics. "We could make them, but the VUB lab is nearby, and it didn't make sense to have two labs in the same vicinity focusing on the same thing. KUL has no objections, ethically or morally, regarding this." The law seems to agree. Flanders

is at the forefront of hESC research for two reasons, and one of them is legality. "The 2003 law that regulates embryo research in Belgium allows us to do a lot of great work," says Sermon. "But it is also very clear: Both the scientists and the patients are protected. You have to ask for permission for any work you want to do, which takes time. But this is a small price to pay. You can do the research as long as you follow the rules."

Professor De Sutter of UGent admits that it is a liberal law, but that universities still can't "do whatever we want". Any planned research must receive approval from both regional and federal ethics committees. "There are strict regulations," she says. "It has to be relevant, and we must explain why we want to do the work. It is actually time-consuming and difficult to get clearance. Another condition is we must be given informed consent by patients. So we tell them quite specifically what we will do with the embryos – not a vague 'research' explanation."

Access to embryos is the other reason for Flanders' success in this field of research. "We have a unique situation in that we have a lot of embryos available," explains De Sutter. "Our busy *in vitro* fertilisation programme, with 2,500 cycles a year, is the second largest in the country. Only VUB is bigger, with 4,500. This creates the possibility to do this type of research in the first place."

VUB's professor Sermon: "The ethical consideration and legal framework in Belgium is one of our assets. This is why we want to stay on the embryo side of the research – it's really where we have a head-start. This is our niche."



Stem cell therapy has many potential applications, including curing certain kinds of blindness and improved treatments for Parkinson's Disease

Genetic diagnosis

The VUB has a strong reputation in the *in vitro* fertilisation and stem cell community, having made groundbreaking discoveries in the field of male infertility, thanks to intra-cytoplasmic sperm injection of eggs (ICSI), where the best sperm is selected and then injected in the egg *in vitro*. More recently, VUB has made a name for itself in reproductive genetics. Pre-implantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) alerts couples with known genetic defects or diseases as to whether if the embryo is affected by the problem. One or two cells are taken from the embryo for genetic diagnosis.

The egg is fertilised *in vitro*, and "if the embryo is healthy, we can place it in the womb," says Sermon. "At a certain moment, we realised we had all these embryos in a dish with genetic diseases for which there were no models. Now we have a number of hESC lines that carry a disease, which is amazing for research purposes."

One of KUL's projects is very similar, but working from a different starting point – with iPSC, derived from adult cells. "We are generating disease models – for instance, for cardiac or neural disease – as this can lead to better insight into the disease," explains professor Verfaillie. "But with PGD, it must be known at conception that there is a potential for the embryo to be sick."

For most diseases, you can't predict at birth that you will have it; you don't discover the disease until later in life. We are studying how you can take an adult cell, work backwards and make it into an embryonic cell to generate disease models."

Thomas O'Leary at UGent, meanwhile, is taking advantage of his embryologist background to create his own research focus that is not being done in many places – human embryonic stem cell origin.

"The core of my work is understanding how the cells of the embryo transform into stem cells," he explains. "All embryonic stem cells have the same general characteristics, which are related to the changes that happen [in the embryo] when they are created." The inner cell mass undergoes a series of transformations before the stem cells emerge. "No one has ever really looked at this stage before in detail," notes O'Leary. "The importance of this new stage, which I've called the post inner cell mass intermediate (PICMI), provides insight into why human embryonic stem cells have the characteristics they have and the potential to create pluripotent stem cells with different characteristics." The paper, he says, is just "an initial step, a platform in identifying the structure. There is still so much to learn, so much unknown. It's exciting to contribute to something that has this much potential".



Previously the director of the Stem Cell Institute at the University of Minnesota in the United States, Flemish professor Catherine Verfaillie (left) now holds the same position at the University of Leuven

New rules for daycare

Flanders promises a place for every child by 2020

Alan Hope

The Flemish parliament last week approved the government's plans for a new decree governing daycare for children, by a vote of 53 to 29.

Among the requirements are that each new daycare facility receive a licence from Kind & Gezin, the Flemish agency for families, and that staff speak Dutch, in order for the facility to be eligible for subsidies. Some crèches that were previously registered with Kind & Gezin have now switched to the French-speaking equivalent to avoid the new language rule.

The government's aim is to make a place available by 2020 for every child under the age of 2.5 years requiring daycare. At 2.5, toddlers become eligible to enter pre-school, which is free except for supervision of children before and after normal school hours. Welfare minister Jo Vandeurzen has promised extra resources to pay for the extension of daycare provision to help reach that target. How much that will be has not yet been specified, which was one of the stumbling blocks to obtaining the agreement of opposition parties last week.

At present, Flanders is suffering a growing shortage of daycare places, with estimates that 3,000 new places will be required by 2016. Vandeurzen has promised 1,000 new places this year. All daycare will now be organised on three levels: family care (child-minders), group care (crèches) and home care (babysitters or nannies). Extra subsidies will be given to daycare that operates a means-tested payment system or that works with disadvantaged families.

UnieKO, the organisation for independent daycare facilities in Flanders, has warned that the new decree could lead to an almost doubling of the cost of daycare, from an average of €22 a day to €41.50.

Meanwhile in Brussels, where the shortage of places is even more acute, welfare and family minister Brigitte Grouwels (*pictured*) this week took part in the demolition of one crèche in Ukkel to make way for another larger one. The Pluchke crèche is currently housed in an old building of the parish church and looks after 57 children. The new premises will have room for 75.



Boonen returns for tour triumph

Flemish cyclist Tom Boonen made an emphatic return to the top last Sunday, winning a record-equalling third Tour of Flanders, six years after his previous triumph. The 31-year-old, a winner in 2005 and 2006, beat Italian duo Filippo Pozzato and Alessandro Ballan in a sprint finish to the 255-kilometre race.

Boonen was with Pozzato and Ballan on the penultimate climb with 18km to go when the three broke away from the pack. But in an open sprint to the line, Boonen held a bike-length margin over Pozzato. "The victories record is the cherry on the cake," said Boonen. "It only adds to my happiness to have my name alongside those who have entered the history books in this race." Boonen had enjoyed victories in two other Belgian classics in the past two weeks – the E3 and Gent-Wevelgem races.

This year's Tour of Flanders included a controversial new finish with three tough climbs dotted along a circuit cut through Flanders. With 61km to go, Switzerland's Fabian Cancellara, winner of the tour in 2010, crashed in the middle of the pack during a chaotic stretch. Last year's tour winner, Flemish rider Nick Nuyens, could not race this year because of a hip injury. *Leo Cendrowicz*



"Genieten" is favourite word

According to a survey carried out by Bru-Taal, the Brussels-based network for language learning, the favourite word of foreigners learning Dutch is *genieten*, which means "to enjoy". Second place went to *appelblauwzeegroen*, used to refer to an indefinable colour (literally "apple-blue-sea-green"). In third place was *pintje* (pint) – one of the first words all visitors to Dutch-speaking Belgium learn, though hardly used at all in the Netherlands.

The vote was taken among some 200 people present in the Maalbeek cultural centre in Brussels, who heard the 10 nominated words defended by their proponents. Bru-Taal organises conversation tables where Dutch learners can talk with native speakers.

► www.bru-taal.be

Fines for gay bashing in Brussels

Verbal or physical gay bashing can now be punished in Brussels by an administrative sanction. The new system covers the municipalities of Brussels City and Elsene, which form a single police zone. The extension of the system of administrative sanctions also includes threats and violence in general, harassment and some instances of theft. The intention is, said Brussels mayor Freddy Thielemans, to counter the "feeling of impunity" caused when relatively minor offences are not prosecuted because the prosecutor's office lacks time and resources. Instead, such offences as gay bashing can now be dealt with by administrative fines. Outrage, the organisation fighting homophobia, has questioned the effectiveness of the new measures.

FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

The common people's investor

Dexia Bad Bank warrantor. That is how one Facebook contact describes his position in life. He is not alone: every taxpayer in Belgium will be contributing to the government bail-out of Dexia Bank, now Belfius, for decades to come. The amount to pay could increase at any time, for if the bank fails, we have to pay up even more.

The parliamentary commission looking into the Dexia debacle ended in disappointment last week, not pointing the finger at anyone responsible for the bank's failure. This said, the commission did cause plenty of damage, mostly to ACW.

ACW is the Christian Workers Movement, an umbrella organisation that includes the ACV trade union, the CM mutuality, organisations for youth, women and elderly, a holiday organisation and a service that provides care in the home. Its membership runs at over four million.

Its power is informal, but real and works mostly through "befriended" CD&V politicians, including former prime ministers Jean-Luc Dehaene and Yves Leterme, vice prime minister Steven Vanackere, Flemish minister Hilde Crevits and secretary of state Servais Verherstraeten.

During election periods, they happily associate with ACW and its many members. These days, though, many of them downplay their links with the workers' movement.

ACW is not just the organisation of the common people, it is also a big investor. One of ACW's organisations is Arco, a cooperative holding that invested heavily in Dexia. Recently it was revealed that Arco was driven by greed, which contributed to the downfall of Dexia, as long-term prospects were overlooked.

Arco came under fire, too, when it got a state warrant for its co-operative shareholders. As these are small investors – many of the 800,000 of them were hardly aware they were shareholders at all – they got the same protection as people with a savings account. There is some logic in this, but it also discriminates against other shareholders – and once again it may cost us all a pretty penny. When it became public that, on top of all that, Arco is eligible to dividend pay-outs should Belfius ever make any profit, indignation ran high. Belfius was saved by public money; it is now a state bank, paid for by all of us. So why should anyone but us, the Dexia Bad Bank warrantors, benefit from possible profits? ACW is still searching for a credible answer to that one.

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

6

weeks' duration for this year's flu epidemic, compared to eight to 10 weeks in a normal year

24%

increase in the number of cyclists in Brussels in 2011, according to a survey by cycling organisation Pro Velo

23,916

inhabitants of Hasselt for every magistrate in the court of first instance, compared to a national average of 15,055

31

drivers last year received payments of up to €5,000 each from the Brussels Region for damage caused to their vehicle by poorly maintained roads. Another 197 complaints were rejected

28%

of calls to the Centre for Suicide Prevention in 2011 came from family members of the person in danger, an increase from 18% a decade before. The centre can be reached by phone (106) or by online chat (www.zelfmoordlijn.be)

Happy birthday P&O

Shipping firm at Zeebrugge celebrates 175 years of steamboats and leisure cruises

Marcel Schoeters

In 1837, two enterprising gentlemen tried their luck investing in the new technology of steam shipping. This year, the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company, better known as P&O, is celebrating its 175th anniversary. The original company has grown into a group with a strong presence in Zeebrugge on the Flemish coast. P&O's founding fathers were Brodie McGhie Willcox (in contemporary documents described as "a young man with no influence and but limited pecuniary means") and Arthur Anderson, whom he employed as a clerk. By 1835, thanks to the financial backing of Dublin ship owner Richard Bourne, they were able to set up under the name Peninsular Steam Navigation Company, as they had set their minds on launching a regular service to the Iberian Peninsula.

The operation of regular intercontinental services was impossible before the arrival of the steam ship. World maritime trade relied on sailing ships, which were cheap and easy to run. They were also unreliable, being totally reliant on tides and winds.

The Royal Navy, ordered to rule Britannia's waves, would not hear of the steamers. There was no artistry in working steamships, especially not compared to bringing a square-rigged ship into the harbour. And, besides,

steamships were dirty and smelly. So it was up to merchant shipping to try out the new technology, which had already driven the sounds of saws, planes and chisels and the sweet scent of freshly cut wood out of the shipbuilding yards, to be replaced by the heat, smells and hammering of casting and ironworking.

A risk that paid off

The concept of steam in shipping had been around since the late 18th and early 19th century, but it had been restricted to inland and coastal shipping. In the early days, the steam engine was used merely as an extra source of propulsion, rather than a power in its own right. As such, they were not fit for ocean-going and were deployed merely for inland shipping and coastal services.

Anderson and Wilcox took a huge risk with this endeavour, just like that contemporary of theirs, Samuel Cunard, who decided to deploy steam ships on the western routes. When, in 1837, the company was granted a contract to carry mail from the UK to Spain and Portugal, the real foundation stone was laid for what was to become P&O. The "O" for Oriental was added in 1840, when another contract was landed to carry mail to Egypt and, in the years to come, to the farthest shores of the British Empire.



In 1904, P&O was the first ship operator to introduce the concept of the leisure cruise. The company survived two world wars and various economic crises thanks to its proactive and resilient attitude towards major changes in the market. In the 1960s, the company acquired interests in the container business and eventually in terminal handling. In 2006, the group itself was taken over by Dubai World Ports, one of the major terminal operators in the Port of Antwerp.

But it is the core ship owning business that is celebrating its 175th anniversary this year.

The Port of Zeebrugge will no doubt get its fair share of the festivities. Thanks to P&O Ferries, the Flemish coastal port has been able to develop as a major continental gateway for traffic to and from the UK. Specialisation is the key word in the offer from Zeebrugge. Served by the Pride of York and the Pride of Bruges, the overnight Zeebrugge-Hull service

can land passengers and freight in northern England and Scotland. Freight and lorries are taken board the Bore Song and European Trader on the Zeebrugge-Middlesbrough Teesport route as well as between Zeebrugge and Tilbury. All these services allow lorry drivers to comply with the European regulation on driving and resting time.

► www.poferries.be

Mobile costs to come down

Belgacom packages mobile internet service as competition heats up

Alan Hope

Consumers' organisation Test-Aankoop and the European Parliament both found reason to criticise internet and mobile telephone prices in Flanders last week, just as competition between the two major internet service providers went up a notch.

The Belgian internet market is split between Mechelen-based Telenet, which has a leading presence in Flanders, and state-owned Belgacom, which has a majority in Brussels and Wallonia. Both companies also operate in the mobile telephony market, where they lease out their infrastructure to smaller competitors.

Last week, Belgacom upped the ante in the controversial mobile internet market with the announcement that, from 16 April, all internet clients would henceforth have mobile internet as part of their package, at no extra cost. If, in other words, you're connected via Belgacom for fixed internet at home, then you will now be receiving

between 50MB and 250MB a month of mobile internet access for free, to use with smartphone, laptop or tablet. At the same time, download speeds for all mobile users go up to 30MB per second.

For small business and independent clients, the changes come into force on 2 May. The company said the changes would take place automatically, though some users may need to obtain a new SIM card to be able to use the new system.

The announcement came just as consumer organisation Test-Aankoop revealed that mobile internet in Belgium is too expensive on the whole, as a result of the lack of real competition in the market. In addition, the best deals available are mainly offered by small providers such as Scarlet and Mobile Vikings. Telenet led in only one category: the intensive user who burns through four hours of calls, 140 text messages and 200MB of data a month.

Belgacom's new deal wipes that



option from the slate, since that user will now be better off packaging the mobile internet

with a Belgacom fixed internet account. Taking mobile internet out of Test-Aankoop's calculations,

the remaining criteria – length of time used making calls and number of text messages – leaves little to choose between all operators.

Meanwhile the European Council and the European Parliament have approved a new price reduction for roaming – the charges applied when calling to or from another country – to come into force on 1 July. At present, roaming charges are still considered extortionately high.

From 1 July, a call made between two countries in the EU can cost a maximum of 29 cents a minute, compared to 42 cents now. Receiving a call from another country will cost at most 8 cents a minute, down from 13 cents now. The cost of a text message goes down from 11 cents to 9 cents. The cost of data roaming, which has in the past led to bills in the thousands of euros for holidaymakers who went online without realising the cost, is cut the deepest, from €2.23 per megabyte to only 70 cents.

THE WEEK
IN BUSINESS**Air Transport**
► **Brussels Airport**

The start of the summer flight season sees eight additional destinations connected with Brussels Airport. They include Cork in Ireland three times a week, Larnaca, Cyprus with five weekly flights and Parma in Italy with three weekly connections. The others are Fez, Gazipasa, Ponta Delgada, Ohrid and Skopje. Also at Brussels Airport include, tour operator Jetair has decided to invest €25 million in technical facilities to maintain the carrier's 16 aircraft.

Banks
► **BKCP**

Brussels-based BKCP bank, an affiliate of France's Credit Mutuel, has acquired the nine branches of East Flanders' OBK bank to further expand its local operations. BKCP had already acquired the Belgian retail activities of Citibank late last year to strengthen its position.

Brewing
► **Duvel Moortgat**

The Duvel Moortgat brewing company in Puurs, Antwerp province, increased its profits by 18.6% last year, compared to 2010. It was the first full year that income from De Koninck, which it bought in 2010, could be included. Duvel owns the brands La Chouffe, Maredsous and Liefmans in addition to De Koninck.

Hotels
► **Klooster**

The Leuven-based Klooster Hotel, one of a number of hotels situated within historical buildings owned by the Martin family, will invest €16 million to increase the number of rooms from 39 to 103 and to add three meeting rooms. The number of overnight visitors to Leuven has increased significantly over recent years to some 270,000 in 2011.

Nomination
► **Voka**

The Flemish chamber of commerce Voka has elected Michel Delbaere as its new president. He succeeds Luc De Bruyckere. Delbaere is head of Crop's frozen vegetable and food producer in Wielsbeke, West Flanders.

Petrochemicals
► **Q8**

Kuwait Petroleum Corporation has announced plans to expand capacity of its lubricants production unit in the Port of Antwerp area. The company expects to invest well in excess of the €20 million spent in renovation work three years ago.

Brussels Airlines complains of “unfair competition”

CEO of flag carrier airline threatens to leave their base at Brussels Airport

Alan Hope

Brussels Airlines is ready to leave its base at Brussels Airport at Zaventem if the government refuses to restore fair competition with low-cost airline Ryanair, according to a statement from CEO Bernard Gustin last week. The company's founder-chairman, Etienne Davignon, later denied any plans to uproot the airline.

Whatever the case, both men agree that BA is not seeking special tax treatment or subsidy from the government but that something has to be done about the Ryanair situation. The low-cost airline is based in Ireland and pays its pilots and other staff according to a highly advantageous Irish system, compared to the restriction under which BA operates in Belgium.

In addition, Ryanair and Brussels-South airport in Charleroi benefit from generous subsidies from the Walloon region, whereas BA gets nothing from either the federal government or from Flanders, where Brussels Airport is based.

Gustin was reported to be considering a move from Zaventem to either Luxembourg or Ireland, both of which would place BA on a similar footing to Ryanair. Davignon later said that the airline still considered Zaventem the best possible base. “Brussels Airlines is not at the moment considering a move out of Belgium,” he said. “If the management has sounded the alarm, it is because the company does not wish to proceed to such extreme action.”

Brussels Airlines operates 300 flights a day out of Brussels Airport, to 70 destinations worldwide, and employs 3,300 people. The airline, 45% owned by Lufthansa, was created after the collapse of national airline Sabena in 2001.

Ryanair has been operating out of Charleroi in Wallonia since 1997, and the airport was Ryanair's first base outside of Ireland. Since the arrival of Ryanair, Charleroi airport has moved to a new site and has been transformed into the starting point



of holidays and weekend breaks for almost six million passengers a year. According to Arnaud Feist, CEO of Brussels Airport Company (BAC), Charleroi airport receives €30 million in subsidies from the Walloon region, equivalent to a subsidy of €12 for every passenger using the airport. In addition, Charleroi pays no contribution to air traffic control organisation

Belgocontrol, which amounts to a further subsidy of about €3 per passenger. BAC, on the other hand, pays €7 million a year.

Brussels Airlines has denied it is seeking subsidies but says that “something must be done” to tackle the problem of what the company calls “unfair competition”. Ryanair has advised the airline to move to Ireland.

Aalst most enterprising city

Aalst in East Flanders has been declared this year's Enterprising Town by Unizo, the Flemish organisation representing the self-employed. Aalst won the prize for its services package Hartelijk Ondernemen (Open-hearted Enterprise), which provides tailor-made services for new businesses. “We're not talking about clichéd activities but a structural and integrated approach to enterprise policy,” according to the jury, chaired by Mark Suykens, the director of the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG).

The package includes the services

of an economic consultant, a centre manager and a coach for the food service industry. “The economic service in Aalst no longer has to ask itself if it meets the requirements of entrepreneurs, but instead how it can meet their every need,” stated the jury. “That's a way of thinking that still hasn't become the norm in many towns.”

Nominations for the prize are proposed by local Unizo branches and considered by the jury, which also includes representatives of the Flemish government. Ghent and Genk were among other nominees. Unizo at the same time announced

that Overijse in Flemish Brabant has been voted Enterprise Municipality of the year, for its Vibrant Overijse campaign, which combines a strong business policy with one-off actions, including the renovation of the station square, a business premises fund, a commercial innovation plan and a sticker campaign.

“After a wide-ranging strategic planning analysis, Overijse decided to take action with a programme made to measure for businesses,” the jury said. “The most important aspect of the project is the very high rate of participation of businesses, which sets an example for other

municipalities.”

The awards for the two towns will be something for them to take in to the coming municipal elections in October, commented Unizo director-general Karel Van Eetvelt. “Municipal leadership like this is essential for local economic policy,” he said. “Because the municipality is so close to businesses, it is crucial to get them involved in the preparation for the elections.” With that aim in mind, local Unizo chapters have contacted 200 municipalities with a shopping list of priorities for policy following the elections.

Turning young people to technology

Technical and engineering jobs in Flanders are “bottleneck jobs”, or job vacancies that are difficult to fill. In an effort to tackle the chronic shortage of qualified personnel, the Royal Flemish Engineering Association (KVIV) hosts the annual WINT day to present the world of engineering to groups of young people.

WINT stands for science, innovation, networking and technology, and forms part of the World at your Feet programme supported by the KVIV together with the Flemish government's Flanders in Action programme. The aim is to convince students, especially girls, to follow technology or science studies by introducing them to the variety of jobs available in industry. Those who have started or worked for businesses in the sector share their experiences, allowing students to

gain evaluate their own abilities.

The project was launched in 2008, and the first WINT day took place in 2010 in Ghent, followed a year later by the second in Heusden-Zolder. This year's event is at Antwerp Expo. The day consists of a series of workshops presented by companies in the sci/tech sector for students and teachers, with the general public welcomed later in the afternoon for an open visit to the stands set up by businesses. At least one of the staff present at each stand must be female. Students taking part also spend half the day in a product design competition, the results of which will be on display. WINT takes place on 26 April at Antwerp Expo and is open to the public from 15.15. Registration is required.



Students taking part in last year's WINT event in Heusden-Zolder

► www.kviv.be/wint.

Life on Mars

Flemings of the Mars Society took part in a simulated mission in preparation for astronauts one day reaching the red planet

Andy Furniere

The Belgian flag was planted on Mars two years ago, but two Flemings have again set foot on the red planet. Or the closest thing to it on our own planet anyway: Nicky De Munster was commander of a simulated mission to Mars in the Utah desert, while Aster Stein took charge of the educational aspect. The two were at the Mars Desert Research Station run by the Mars Society. The Mars Society is an international, non-profit organisation of scientists, astronauts, educators, astronomers and other space enthusiasts who make it their mission to educate both students and the public about the possibilities of space travel to Mars. The society operates the Mars Desert Research Station in the US state of Utah, where members go on regular simulated missions. The local chapter, Mars Society Belgium, gives classes and workshops to help prepare new generations of astronauts and space engineers. During a simulation at the Mars Desert Research Station last December, six volunteers lived together for two weeks in a small exploration habitat closed off from the world. Excursions on quads or on foot in the Mars-like terrain had to be undertaken in a space suit. Participants performed scientific experiments, took soil samples and tested materials and nutrition for future astronauts and transmitted their experiences to knowledge centres and the public. The Mars Society Belgium is looking ahead to the first human expedition to Mars in the coming decades. De Munster, who teaches information technology in Waregem, West Flanders, and serves as a volunteer teacher at the Euro Space Society in Brussels, was in command of the crew that landed in Utah on 17 December. They were the 109th crew to do such a simulation. De Munster was also part of the all-Belgian crew that, in February 2010, took over the Mars station.

Awe-inspiring experience
During the two weeks in Utah, the crew survived on a diet of powdered food and lived as economically as possible. One of the crew's tasks was to explore and map the surroundings as if it were an unknown planet. "The environment, with its red earth and wide views, was wonderful, but it was exhausting to walk there in heavy space suits and with only just enough to eat," says De Munster. Stein agrees. "And a refreshing shower afterwards was not possible either, as we had to save our water supply as much as possible." Although every team member had a private bedroom, there was no privacy anywhere else in the small habitat. "Cameras registered our movements day and night, like in *Big Brother*," De Munster says. "We didn't have contact with the



Participants in the Mars simulation head out across the Utah desert

world outside, which was lonely sometimes," Stein adds. "But the desolation and silence in the desert were also awe-inspiring." Stein performed experiments that students could later try for themselves. He designed a "solar tube", for example – a black plastic tube filled with air. The air was heated by the sun, which made the tube float 20 metres high, like a hot air balloon.

On the universal map

The Flemish race to Mars started in 2008, with the European Mars

schools and trains teachers to get children interested in space travel through fun experiments in class. Children learn, for example, how to pack an astronaut's suitcase and to prepare the food-packet. One practical experiment involves trying to land an egg using a parachute so that it doesn't break, in a small-scale simulation of a Mars landing. "We want to arouse their curiosity," says Vermeulen, who works for the Royal Meteorological Institute in Brussels and is a flight instructor. "According to the latest predictions,

and gravity challenges. Gravity differences make human bones decalcify and weaken quickly. So why go through all the trouble of putting a person on this inhospitable planet? "Robots only do what they are programmed to do, while humans can explore faster and more efficiently for signs of life," explains Vermeulen. "This could expand our knowledge about the Earth as well." According to Vermeulen, the quest for Mars would accelerate the general development of science and technology. "In the time of Columbus, people still thought the earth was flat," she says. "It takes pioneers to move boundaries, which is what the first people on the moon did."

For these Flemings, space exploration is a lifelong passion. Vermeulen says she has been living between the stars all her life. As a girl, she scanned the sky every night and dreamed of becoming an astronomer. Today, as astrophysicist, pilot and space travel expert, she prepares commercial space flights. "In the future, space trips will become cheaper, just like air transport has," she says. In about a month, she hopes to provide customers with basic training and a few moments of weightlessness in airplanes. As a student, Stein worked at the educative Euro Space Center in Transinne in Wallonia and later often promoted space travel as an employee of Mechelen's hands-on science and technology museum Technopolis. He is now looking forward to a parabolic flight, during which he will experience zero gravity. De Munster, meanwhile, has applied for a new Mars simulation expedition in Hawaii, which would last four months. "Ever since I saw the images of the first man on the moon as an eight-year old boy, I have been hooked," he smiles.

► www.marssociety.be



Nicky De Munster collects samples of water to develop experiments for Belgian students

Convention in Antwerp. The convention is an annual event at which European and American scientists, engineers and other people interested in Mars exploration exchange ideas. The driving force behind the project was Nancy Vermeulen, who two years later established the Belgian chapter of the Mars Society and is now its chair. She was commander of the all-Belgian expedition to the research station in 2010. "We wanted to put our country and our society on the world map," she explains. The society now promotes Mars exploration at exhibitions, fairs and

a Mars expedition should be possible in around 30 years. The kids of today are the engineers, scientists and even astronauts who will make it happen."

Pushing the boundaries

Robots have been performing experiments on Mars for years, but for humans the red planet is still a long way off. Not only would it take six months to get there, the astronauts would have to stay another six months on the planet to be in the right position to leave. Providing enough supplies for the astronauts is a major challenge, not to mention the atmosphere

THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

Volunteers from Likona, Limburg's umbrella organisation for nature studies, **discovered a square metre of the rare moss species rustwort** (*nowellia curvifolia*) on the domain of the historical museum and amusement park Bokrijk in Limburg province. It was 22 years ago that the gold-coloured moss was last seen in Flanders. One of the volunteers was Cécile Nagels, who has been researching mosses for 20 years and has inventoried Limburg's 450 known species for a "moss atlas".

► www.limburg.be/likona

The expansion of Technopolis, the science and technology museum in Mechelen, has officially started. One new zone is meant for children between the age of eight and 14. In a second zone with a workshop and laboratory, families and children between the ages of 14 and 18 **can experiment with a high-speed camera and magnetism**. The museum is also building a centre with educational material for the 15,000 teachers who visit Technopolis each year. The expansion costs €6.85 million and should be finished by the spring of 2013.

► www.technopolis.be

The Provincial College Limburg and the Expertise Centre for Digital Media at the University of Hasselt **have developed a game to help MS patients train their arms**. With the new I-TRAVLE system, patients can lift and drink a cup of coffee, for example, in a virtual environment. A robot at the same time helps and trains the arm to perform the movements.

► www.uhasselt.be/edm

Flanders' first trilingual school will open in Kraainem, a municipality on the edge of Brussels, this September. In the first two years of secondary school, the pupils will be taught in French and Dutch. From the third year, science and maths lessons will be in English. All pupils will have to have French or Dutch as their mother tongue. The Arboretum College is a private school, and the annual fees will be approximately €13,000.

► www.arboretumcollege.be

Postdoctoral researcher Thomas Geernaert of the Free University of Brussels (VUB) has received the **Photonics21 Student Innovation Award 2012** by the European Technology Platform for Photonics. Geernaert developed a new fibre-optic sensor that can be used for artificial skins on touch-sensitive robots. **AF**



ing.be



Contact us at ing.be/expat

Are you an expatriate? If so, you need support and advice. That's exactly what ING can provide for all your banking and insurance requirements. Our ING Expat service deals with everything,

even before you arrive in Belgium: accounts, bank cards, rental guarantee, etc. To find out what ING can do for you, don't hesitate to call one of our advisors on + 32 (0)2 464 66 64.

ING Belgium SA/nv – Bank – avenue Marnix 24, B-1000 Brussels – Brussels RPM/RPR – VAT BE 0403.200.393 – BIC (SWIFT): BBRUBEBB – IBAN: BE45 3109 1560 2789 (Account: 310-9156027-89).
Publisher: Philippe Wallez, cours Saint-Michel 60, 1040 Brussels.



See what you've been missing

A new hiking network connects the Knokke and Zeeland sides of the Zwin nature reserve

Denzil Walton

The Zwin nature reserve in Knokke-Heist is one of Flanders' natural wonders, and the first part of an ambitious development plan has just opened up to the public. A beautifully maintained network of footpaths lets you create your own walks or cycle rides from Knokke to the Netherlands and back again.

There are two ways to describe the Zwin nature reserve. One is that it's a 159-hectare lagoon, which sea water enters with each tide. It comprises dunes, salt marshes, salt pans and two large inlet channels with adjacent tidal flat and creek systems. The whole region extends 2.3 kilometres along the North Sea coastline on the Flemish-Dutch border.

And the other? The Zwin is one of those glorious, mystical areas where sky, land and sea merge to create a spectacular wilderness. It's where the eerie call of the curlew will make the hairs on the back of your neck stand up. It's where you can lie on your back in the sand and watch the clouds scudding overhead, taking your anxieties with them. And it's a place full of contrasts. Sit on the seaward side of a dune, and the wind will cut through your coat and chill you to the bone; move to the sheltered side, and the sun will turn your face red in minutes.

However you describe the Zwin, the good news is that a new cross-border hiking network has just opened there. It consists of more than 50 kilometres of hiking trails in the coastal areas of Knokke in Flanders and Zeeland in the Netherlands.

At the centre of the network is the Zwin nature reserve, but on the Flemish side the footpaths also run through the surrounding dunes and polders, along the coastline and even through the streets of Knokke. On the Dutch side, the paths pass through the charming municipalities of Cadzand and Retranchement and connect with Zeeland's own network of footpaths. This means that one of my favourite coastal paths, from Breskens to Cadzand-Bad, has suddenly been extended. Now I am able to keep



going by crossing the Uitwaterings canal and walking along the edges of the reserve itself. I can even go further and walk into Knokke. However, as the total distance from Breskens to Knokke is more than 25km, getting the bus back to Breskens has its appeal.

Feet, wheels or hooves?

The Zwin nature reserve and surrounding polders are largely undeveloped, so the footpaths provide spectacular views of the sea, the vastness of the estuarine marshes and the dunes. But don't forget this is a network. It's not just a string of paths laid out randomly. This is an expertly devised criss-cross of well-developed and excellently signposted paths. Thanks to an informative water-resistant map (€6 from local tourist

offices), you can devise your own walk, making it as short or as long as your time and energy allow. You simply go from one numbered junction to the next. Each junction is clearly marked and points you in the direction of the next one. The network can be used by cyclists and those on horseback, too. Some of the paths are like a three-lane rural motorway, with dedicated lanes for feet, bikes and horses.

More changes afoot

The new hiking network is just one component of a major redevelopment of the Zwin area. Plans are well advanced to turn the Zwin into a contemporary, educational and touristic nature destination. I'm not totally convinced about their new slogan, however, which is: "The Zwin: an

international airport for birds". By focusing solely on birds it denigrates the Zwin's importance as an area rich in salt-loving wild flowers. Some of these are as interesting in appearance as they are in name: sea lavender, herbaceous seepweed, glasswort, greater sea-spurrey and sea milkwort.

Moreover, an airport is merely a temporary stop-off; a place where you stay for as short a time as possible before heading off to where you really want to go. That's not the case with the Zwin, where hundreds of birds – from storks to stonechats, ringed plovers to reed buntings – take up residence for the spring and summer to raise their broods. In the autumn, the arriving wild geese might look like planes landing at an airport, but these birds will also stay for months, making it their winter lodgings.

Still, the plans look impressive, with one of the highlights being a new viewing centre. This will be a large circular building with windows offering superb panoramic views over the Zwin plain. Visitors will have the opportunity to observe the tide, plants, birds and other aspects of the Zwin in comfort, whatever the weather.

No cages please!

Also in the plans is a modernised Zwin Nature Centre. Its focus will be education, nature development and sustainability. This is also welcome news because the sooner the current centre is shut down the better. It's a hideously outdated concept that has no place in the ecologically aware

21st century.

I can imagine the original idea seemed a bright one – but that was in 1953 when Count Leon Lippens turned the Knokke royal residence and gardens into a bird zoo. You can imagine someone thinking: "We have all these wild birds in the Zwin, but they're so far off and difficult to see. I know, let's catch some of them and put them in cages so people can see them close-up!"

Unfortunately, the results are still visible today. More than 20 cages house birds that can be seen in the wild less than a kilometre away. These include oystercatchers, avocets, turnstones, curlews and godwits – birds that belong to the vast expanses of the salt flats and the estuary. There's even a cage with seagulls in it. Anyone wanting to look at a gull at close quarters just has to walk along the promenade in Knokke while eating a sandwich. But the most distressing sights are of a red kite, a black kite and a peregrine falcon. To see these birds in cages, when they are normally seen soaring in the open blue skies, is heart-wrenching.

I hope that the outstanding efforts that have gone into making the network of coastal footpaths such a marvellous and highly attractive new feature of the Zwin will now be channelled to create an equally impressive new Zwin Nature Centre that – unlike the current one – is a credit to the province of West Flanders.

► www.zwin.be



Live! We take care of the rest!

Euromut
welcomes you
to Belgium.

It is essential that you receive the best health care advice and customer service. We'll make your administration as easy as possible and have solutions for every request.
More than 4,000 expats choose Euromut every year. They can't be wrong!

Contact the Business Customer Care by mail: expats@euromut.be, by phone: +32 2 44 44 700.



euromut
health insurance

Live! we take care of the rest!

www.euromut.be/expats

A city in a life story

A new book tells the story of one of Antwerp's most prominent families, from the 17th century to the present day

Marc Maes

"It would require a second book to list the full details of my life. I'd say this one is a survey of success and defeat, and the art of combining both in one life."

That's how Count Daniel Le Grelle describes *Een groot Antwerps verhaal* (A Great Antwerp Story), a new book by journalist Lex Moolenaar based on hours of interviews with Le Grelle. "It's a story, more than a biography," Le Grelle says.

Een groot Antwerps verhaal (Linkeroever Uitgevers) summarises a substantial part of the history of Antwerp, through the eyes of an energetic, charismatic nobleman. Close to his 90th birthday, Le Grelle felt the time was right for it to be put down in words.

"I did everything my way, without letting events or people change my personality"

The Le Grelle family's link with the city of Antwerp goes back to the 17th century, when Guillaume Le Grelle came to live in the port city and began working as a baker. From then, the family has been omnipresent in the city's political, merchant and social life.

Guillaume's grandson Gerard is considered the *pater familias* of the current Le Grelle family. Gerard's youngest son, Joseph, founded the Banque Le Grelle in 1792, which was, in 1964, sold to the Generale Bank. His brother, Henri, was an alderman in Antwerp and brought nobility to the family when he was named esquire in 1794, a status awarded to the entire Le Grelle line in 1822.

In 1831, Joseph's son (another Gerard) became Antwerp's first – and only – directly elected mayor, a year after the country's independence. "Quite a remarkable accomplishment," notes Moolenaar. "As a family of nobility, the Le Grelles were extremely loyal to the Belgian royal house, but the family were also true 'orangists', followers of the Dutch king Willem I, strongly believing in a unified Holland and Flanders, even today. Right after the country's independence, many followers of the 'orangist' movement moved to the Netherlands. But Gerard, inspired by a sense of duty, decided to stay. He managed to unite liberals and Catholics to become, at the age of 38, mayor of Antwerp."

A port with "a human face"

Daniel Le Grelle is the only living great-grandson of Gerard (who was awarded the title of count in 1853) and continues in his footsteps. For 30 years, Le Grelle was a member of the Antwerp city council. He was affiliated with the CVP political party (now CD&V) but was elected as an independent, proof of the power of the family name. "I did everything my way, without letting events or people change my personality." The count moved to Berendrecht, north of Antwerp, and in 1948 teamed up with Count Moretus, mayor of Stabroek, to fight the

ongoing expansion of the Port of Antwerp. "We've always strived for a viable combination of port activities and nature, for a port with a human face," he explains. "But I've witnessed the expansion of the port; I've seen people being chased out of their farms at gunpoint, and Antwerp city council was the platform to raise the protest. Thanks to our battle, we have managed to safeguard the nature and villages of Berendrecht, Zandvliet, Lillo, Stabroek and Kapellen from becoming port industry sites."

Today, the Le Grelle castle is a unique vantage point looking out over the Reigersbos in Berendrecht, from where you can watch grey herons build their nests.

A delicate balance

As a banker, Le Grelle started his career in 1947 with the Dutch bank Van Mierlo in Antwerp. In the 1970s, he became CEO of the Antwerp branch. "Both ABN Bank and the US-based Continental Bank wanted to buy us. I decided to go overseas, bearing in mind the basic principles of banking, with solid securities and well-defined contracts."

At the age of 55, Le Grelle joined inspection and control organisation Vinçotte, where he was named manager and member of the board. He adapted the judicial structure of the organisation and prepared the 1990 merger with their biggest competitors, AIB.

In addition to his hectic professional agenda, he also found the time for sport – as a tennis player, he presided over the prestigious Den Brandt tennis circle in Antwerp. In



Daniel Le Grelle (left) meets King Boudewijn in 1958

1967, he was named chairman of the Provincial Association of the Belgian Olympic Committee and it was he who introduced the now International Olympic Committee president Jacques Rogge to the organisation.

Le Grelle also promoted the installation of public basketball courts in Antwerp's districts and helped the city's KAZC become the country's leading swimming club.

"It all comes down to passing on life values: That's essential to me," he says of the 180 pages in the book.

"In writing *Een groot Antwerps verhaal* I learned a lot myself," Moolenaar admits. "The difference in culture – and political culture – the battle for nature and heritage, the careful balance between city preservation and innovation. Daniel Le Grelle invites the reader to look ahead."

Flanders creates a "national trust" for heritage

Flanders has a new heritage organisation that will be able to work on the same level as major international counterparts like English Heritage and the National Trust in the UK. The new organisation brings together three existing bodies: ErfgoedVlaanderen (Flanders Heritage), Forum voor Erfgoedverenigingen (the Forum for Heritage Associations) and Open Monumentendag (Open Monument Day) in a single organisation.

"The major examples of strong heritage associations are to be found on the other side of the Channel," says Flemish heritage and tourism minister Geert Bourgeois. "The British National Trust has 3.6 million members. Thanks to that huge membership

they have far more financial resources than ours, £100 million in membership fees and a large number of bequests, worth about £47 million a year. The National Trust of Scotland is the country's largest membership association, with about 300,000 members at the moment."

Heritage has widespread public support in Flanders, evidenced by the popularity of both Open Monument Day and the upcoming Heritage Day, plus public support for restoration works on Fort Napoleon in Ostend (*pictured*) and Beauvoorde Castle in Veurne.

But, he said, there is "too much fragmentation" at an organisational level. "The new organisation will have more impact and a wider sphere of activity," he says. It will



© Marc Ryckaert/Wikimedia Commons

also receive more money: A subsidy of €2.2 million, which is €500,000 more than the three organisations received separately.

The new organisation is known for the time being as Nieuwe Erfgoed

Organisatie, or New Heritage Organisation. A definitive name is promised later in the year.

Viviane Herrygers, director of Open Monument Day, has been named as the director-general of

the new organisation. Jan van den Nieuwenhuijzen, CEO of payroll and HR firm SD Worx, is chairman.

Alan Hope

► www.eennaamvoor erfgoed.be

Drawing the shapes of music



Paquet made illustrations of BJO, and in turn the jazz band made music to go with his stories of the jazz greats for *Graphicology*

Philip Paquet turns the Brussels Jazz Orchestra into comic book characters

Tom Peeters

Antwerp illustrator, comic artist and painter Philip Paquet considers himself a storyteller first. And what's better for a good story than a good soundtrack?

So the Brussels Jazz Orchestra (BJO), together with Flemish trumpeter Bert Joris, wrote a score to Paquet's famous jazz stories. To return the favour, he drew a story about the renowned big band. The result is the live performance *Graphicology: A Visual Jazz Score*. Paquet, 38, lives in a neat apartment in the Berchem district of Antwerp. The distinctive mix of black and white with only an occasional blotch of colour that typifies his graphic novels is reflected in both his interior and his clothing style.

Black is the colour of jazz, his passion, and of the night. Paquet is not a 9 to 5 person. He likes a hint of darkness. And white is the colour each illustrator has to come to terms with, certainly when facing another empty page.

The illustrations for *Graphicology*, which will be projected to the live music of the BJO, are in sepia grey – ideal for shaping the mood of his favourite musical genre. "I started drawing jazz musicians because I liked everything around it," Paquet tells me. "Not only the music – I'm a bassist myself – but also the bars and the smoke."

Paquet hung out in those places from the time he was a teenager. "In those days, you could spot me in Antwerp music bars like De Muziekdoos and De Muze with a pipe; it fit the lifestyle," he smiles. "And while reading the biographies of the biggest jazz names, plenty of images appeared in my head."

BJO as strip characters

Fragments of three of his graphic novels – the biographical *Louis Armstrong* (2001), the compilation *Snapshots* (2003) and *Playin'/Smilin'/Fightin'/Cookin'* (2010),

which are all written in English – are all part of *Graphicology*. It was Toon Horsten from the graphic arts support organisation Strip Turnhout who connected Frank Vaganée, the artistic leader of BJO, with Paquet.

They decided to create two new stories, one in which BJO plays a major role. "They are chasing me the whole evening," says Paquet, who didn't want to portray them too realistically. "It stays a comic, and, for sure, there are a few 'character heads' in the band." Another new story takes place in New Orleans. "It's about the legislative history of the blues. I try to evoke some magic realism: There are lot of references to voodoo, and we visit the crossroads."

Paquet was astonished to see how few words the musicians needed to get *Graphicology* right and how much attention they paid to particular details. "While composing, Bert Joris even called me a few times for a background check on some characters in my story."

Batman & Franquin

Paquet has been drawing from the moment he could hold a pencil. Much to the annoyance of his teachers, it became a true obsession. "My dad wasn't too fond of the idea, but my mother, who was not allowed to go to art school herself because my grandfather didn't support her, gave me the freedom to do what I wanted. She was not amused when I gave up secondary school, but I was just fed up with it and wanted to earn a living with my pencil."

At 16 he discovered the Mekanik comic book shop in Antwerp. Batman, above all, appealed to him. "It eventually occurred to me that all good comic artists had worked on Batman." Contemporary American graphic novelist David Mazzucchelli, who created the graphic novel *Asterios Polyp*, "began his career drawing Batman," says Paquet. "The same for Frank Miller. Next to Batman, I fancied the work of Franquin. *Zwartkijken*, his comic book from 1977, was an eye-opener: only black ink, dark and very cynical.

He had a go at a Batman story, too, but it never got published. But as a 23-year-old, he was – rather surprisingly – selected for an exhibition in New York. "I had sent in my first jazz comic *Miles da cat as remembered by the Bird*. They liked it, and I was part of a group exhibition in the Jazz Gallery in New York. "From that moment on, I knew what I was going to do."

He took it as a sign and kept on drawing jazz comics. First there was *Louis Armstrong*, in which he portrayed Satchmo's youth and early days as a musician. It earned him a small but worldwide cult following. He remembers meeting the Argentinian comic artist José Muñoz, who had published a graphic novel on Billie Holiday. "He really is one of my heroes. And when we got introduced he said: 'This guy brought Louis Armstrong to life! Your book made me dream, man! I was walking on clouds the rest of the day.'"

In *Playin'/Smilin'/Fightin'/Cookin'* Paquet worked with three writers to tell four stories – two biographical and two fictional – about moments in jazz history. In *Fightin'*, for instance, Paquet imagines what the legendary Charlie Parker might have done during his infamous disappearances while he was performing with Charles Mingus and others at the mythical Massey Hall.

Infantine enthusiasm

As a freelance editor, Paquet's work is also often music related. He provided the artwork for the Blue Note label CD-boxset. Last year he drew illustration representing the Gent Jazz Festival and followed dEUS on tour for *Knack Focus* magazine. Later this year, he

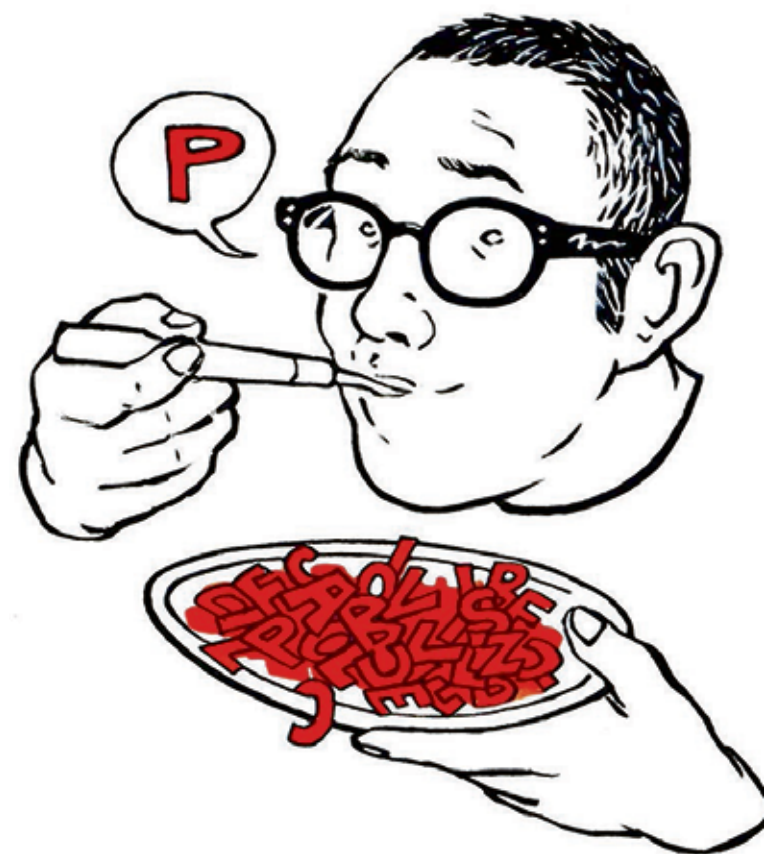
will be an artist-in-residence in Italy, where he will attend some concerts with pencil in hand and work on a new graphic novel, this time in Dutch. "It will be a mix of different styles and a story with a lot of suspense." Right now, a gallery in Berchem is hosting a show of Paquet's work.

Paquet also illustrates live with a "tagtool", a device connected together with a drawing tablet, a projector and a laptop. Operated by an illustrator and an animator, it allows images that have just been drawn to move. Together with animator Gilliom, he livens up festivities with this new, extraordinary tool, most recently a Radio Modern retro party. "I like the variation of the work. I don't want to sit at my drawing table all the time. And what's better than being paid to be at a party?"

But his biggest project so far is definitely the one in the De Villegas Park. The city of Antwerp ordered a work of 150 square metres for the renovation of the park in Berchem. The result will be an illustrated wall in which the last century of the community and its most distinctive people will come to life. The wall should be ready by June, and Paquet has moved his workshop to a secret hideout provided by the city. "We had to look for a room with 50 metres of open space. It really gives me a New York loft feeling."

But whether he's drawing a new comic book or painting a wall, Paquet stays truthful to his mission. "I like to touch people with as few lines as possible, with a visual that recalls an emotion or an atmosphere. But it has to stay pleasant, meaning it should be presented with astonishment and an infantine enthusiasm."

► www.philippaquet.com



Philip Paquet, a self portrait

18 APRIL, 20.00

Graphicology: A Visual Jazz Score

Stadsschouwburg, Bondgenotenlaan 21, Leuven

► www.30cc.be

New York minutes

Guitarist Renaud Audenaerde is as happy on stage in the Big Apple as at home in Flanders

Lawrence De Geest



A guitar is a piece of wood with strings. At around midnight on his first New York City appearance, young Ghent musician Renaud Audenaerde plugged his in while the guitarist from Space Clamps, a popular word-of-mouth band from the East Village, stepped up to the mic. “We’re lucky we’ve got one of the most talented axmen from Belgium with us tonight,” he said to the crowd. “And there’s more good news: Today, so I hear, Belgium finally formed a government.” The applause crested, and Audenaerde, wearing a classic New York paperboy hat, launched into his first song. “Coming to New York City reminded me of the old days of playing for the experience of the moment itself,” says Audenaerde (*pictured*), who hooked up with Space Clamps through a friend. “We rehearsed for two days and then went straight to the gig – all off the cuff. They loved us, but really you just care that you’re doing it.” Making it in music has never been easy. Even the lute-strumming jester of the old days lived by the fickleness of the court. Flanders is crazy about live

sincere enthusiasm. At the next level are annual contests like the rock rally De Bloffen in the arts centre Vooruit, which attracts new groups and huge crowds and awards the winner studio time and tour sponsorship.

Society of headphones

Still, the Flemish scene, unlike off-the-cuff America, prizes polished professionalism over raw talent. Audenaerde is currently applying for his Master’s in music at the selective Brussels Conservatory, renowned for its jazz pedigree, and at the Ghent Conservatory, which is newer and more pop-focused. Most musicians have to supplement their income by teaching, for which a diploma is required. But bands also want recruits with diplomas. “They assume you know loads about music,” says Audenaerde.

Adding to the barrier of entry is the sad fact that contest organisers select acts based on the quality of their recordings, which is like only allowing millionaires to stand for presidential elections. These days it’s more about people knowing your band on MySpace

Audenaerde’s older brother, Ghislain. “We’re on the same wavelength,” says Audenaerde, who started playing piano with him as soon as he could stand. “When we play, we look at each other and just know what to do.”

The keyboard player from Space Clamps said the brothers brought to mind a Lennon and McCartney story: “They were writing ‘Day in The Life’, and John was at the piano, looking for a verse, when Paul suddenly sings, ‘I’d like to turn you on’, and they smile at each other like, ‘I see what you did there.’”

Metro Vivaldi

After several years of classical training, Audenaerde moved into jazz and then his own inventions. Despite predicting a future in music, he didn’t go for it until he took a hiatus from his Master’s in sinology and moved to New York with his girlfriend on a whim. “My parents didn’t want me to only do music,” he says. “Even though I had music in my head day and night, I also had all the insecurities of not knowing what to do. You can’t make all the right choices when you’re 18.”

He found a job slinging drinks at a Manhattan cocktail bar run by Russians and lived in Brooklyn with a young Mexican-Filipino experimental classicist. Music was everywhere. “I remember one late night after work when I was waiting for the subway, I heard these guys, on cello and violin, playing the most beautiful Vivaldi I had ever heard. I asked them where they had trained. They said nowhere. Six years ago they just decided to buy the instruments and teach themselves.” When the set was finished, Audenaerde looked out at the crowd applauding like they were throwing roses. What he felt was truer than words. A guitar is a piece of wood that comes alive in the hands of a guitarist willing to reveal his soul. “I’ll be back,” he says. “Maybe with the Neddies. Unless of course we change our name.”

“I feel most in my element on stage, and Ghent is a great city to start in”

music – Werchter is one of the most popular summer festivals in Europe – but the average local audience is demanding, liable to boo an act off stage after only two minutes. But for Audenaerde and his band, the Neddies, it enhances the thrill. “I feel most in my element on stage,” he says, “and Ghent is a great city to start in.” Ghent, which to most of its residents feels more like a village than a city, has a wide-ranging music scene. Plenty of jazz cafes have live music every week featuring unknown acts. Student bands play in Overpoort with a rudimentary sound system but great ambience and

than knowing what it’s like to see you live. Part of this is the democratisation of the internet. The other part is people predominantly listening to music through headphones. Outside their day jobs, the Neddies are trying to change that. For a long time they focused exclusively on songwriting. Now they’re performing more. Lead singer Ricky organises an annual festival called Fricky Rock where a couple of hundred aficionados show up for three shows a night and beer for €1. The drummer is a married father waiting for the chance to hit the road (with his family). The bassist is

You *can* take it with you

ING gives away bags made out of dismantled artwork

Georgio Valentino

ING Belgium’s headquarters on Marnixlaan in Brussels have been undergoing renovation for some years. Now, its scaffolding-clad facade is straddled by what ING’s PR reps boast as “one of the biggest works of art ever created in Belgium”. The massive digital print, a kinetic frenzy of brightly coloured blobs by Brussels artist Jean-Luc Moerman and called “Multifunctional Polydirectional Hybrids”, was commissioned by the banking giant

to celebrate the building’s imminent liberation from the contractor’s jackhammer. For it’s true: Nothing lasts forever, not even construction. The work will be complete by the autumn, and the scaffolding is due to come down well before then. “Hybrids” will dismount on 30 June. But instead of trashing this colourful canvas or stowing it away for the building’s next facelift, ING has opted to carve it up and create a limited run of unique shoulder bags from the remains. Moerman’s

2,200 square-metre spread will yield a whopping 1,400 bags, to be divvied up by means of an online competition. Winners will have the chance to select the fragment of their choice. Art lovers among ING’s clientele and labour force needn’t fear Moerman’s departure. They can expect the return of the Marnix building’s modern art collection – accumulated over the past half century – as soon as the dust settles and the contractors clear out.



Anyone can enter the competition on the website to win the shoulder bags. If you do not have an ING account, just fill in the branch

nearest you under “your ING branch”

► www.ing.be/ingbag

three visions for a metropolis

Brussels 2040

Nicolas de Moy

What will Brussels be like in 30 years' time? What kind of city will we be living in? These questions were handed over to three teams of professionals from the built environment, including architects, urban planners and sustainable development specialists. Their pragmatic and thoughtful visions of the Brussels metropolis that could be is on show now at Bozar in Brussels.

As you enter the exhibition space (which you do free of charge), you already have to question: where should I start? This is probably what most urban planners and architects must have thought when imagining Brussels three decades from now.

In a small space, a ton of information is available to you: maps, information sheets, videos and models. Various short films from the exhibition's authors are set on different volumes, as if to make this experience even more disconcerting.

A central space offers us the raw

data and maps concerning Brussels and its uppermost important hinterland. The three other spaces represent the various proposals and visions of each team of architects – one based in Brussels, one mostly Dutch and one based in Italy.

One thing is clear: the opportunities and challenges of this city are enormous. From affordable housing, demographic growth and social division to public transport and sustainable development, the teams tackled every aspect.

The team comprised of Brussels-based firms has come up with the idea of a double transport network using the existing rail infrastructure to reconnect the city with its neglected corners, as well as a network of parks along the Molenbeek river to the northwest.

The Italians, meanwhile, want to consider Brussels as a horizontal city. Where New York or Hong Kong are defined by their verticality, Brussels is in some ways defined by its flatness and its capability to

“disappear” into the surrounding countryside.

The Dutch team shows examples of densification from the Erasmus campus to the southwest through the canal and towards the North and Schaarbeek train stations. “As I see all these holes in the urban fabric, my hands are twitching,” says one of the architects on this team.

Most of the proposals are concerned with development nodes and corridors, such as the canal, railway lines and the topographical structure of Brussels based on its rivers and soft valleys. Surrounded by cities such as Rotterdam, Lille and the Rhur area in Germany, we are reminded of the strategic position this city has.

Most importantly, this exhibition enables the viewer to see Brussels and its economical hinterland from an aerial perspective; sometimes we forget about a city's influence beyond its administrative borders. Here we are boldly told that Brussels need to go beyond its boundaries



and become a proper metropolis. *Brussels 2040* is an exhibition that will probably – and unfortunately – be visited mainly by professionals

and students of the field. But the future of our capital is a matter that concerns us all.

Until 15 April | Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23, Brussels | www.bozar.be

MUSIC FESTIVAL

Tomorrowland

This eighth edition of Flanders' world-famous, award-winning outdoor dance music festival promises to be another rager – for those lucky enough to get their hands on tickets, that is. Some already confirmed names include (are you sitting down?) Swedish DJ Avicii, French house music god David Guetta, American electro-house musician Steve Aoki, the UK's one and only acid house techno champ Carl Cox, Italian dance-punk music project The Bloody Beetroots, the DJ of all DJs Mr John Digweed, the ever-funky Fatboy Slim and so, so many more.

Because of the enormous success of Tomorrowland, not far from Antwerp, organisers gave Belgian residents priority for the first 80,000 of the 180,000 tickets. They were sold out in one day. Worldwide tickets sales start on 7 April. So if you're online, determined and patient, you might just get in to one of the world's trippiest dance festivals. **Robyn Boyle**



GET TICKETS NOW

27-29 July | Worldwide ticket sales start 7 April
Schommellei, Boom

www.tomorrowland.be

MORE MUSIC FESTIVALS THIS WEEK

Bierbeek (Flemish Brabant)

Blues'd Up Festival: Annual blues festival featuring Roland Tchakounté (CAM/F), Kyla Brox Band (UK) and Kirk Fletcher Band (USA)

APR 7 18.30-1.00 at CC de Borre, Speelpleinstraat 10

www.bierbeekbluesdup.be

Ghent

REWIND-easter-FEST: New Wave Classix festival featuring eight bands each day and after-parties

APR 6-7 16.30-5.00 at Vooruit, Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 23

www.new-wave-classix.be

SPRING BLOOMS

Floralia Brussels

If you like tulips, there's no need to go all the way to our neighbours in the north. For the next four weeks, the 14-hectare park around the Castle of Groot-Bijgaarden, just outside of Brussels, is bursting with the colour of more than 400 varieties. And there's also narcissi, daffodils, hyacinth and numerous rare flowers, spread out like a carpet under the park's ancient trees. This annual international flower exhibition makes for a lovely day out, or in. The park's greenhouses are equally impressive, boasting 1,000 square metres of blooming garden beds and flower arrangements that change every Friday when a renowned artist from the Netherlands and his team will arrange bouquets according to the theme of the week. **RB**



6 April to 6 May | Groot-Bijgaarden Castle | www.floralia-brussels.be

MORE BLOOMS THIS WEEK

Eeklo (East Flanders)

Om de tuin g eleid: Walk through the blossoming plants of Het Leen Arboretum, featuring camellias, rhododendrons, magnolias and more

APR 8 14.00-16.00 at Provinciaal Domein Het Leen, Gentsesteenweg 80

www.oost-vlaanderen.be

Hasselt

Hanami Festival: Bring along a picnic and enjoy the bright pink blossoms of the cherry trees in Europe's largest Japanese Garden

APR 8 14.00-18.00 at Gouverneur Verwilghensingel 23

www.20jaarjapansetuin.be

Meise

Magnolia Walk: Guided educational tour (in Dutch or French) through the National Botanic Garden's impressive collection of magnolias

Until APR 30 at Nieuwelaan 38

www.br.fgov.be

KIDS

Easter Egg Hunt

Brusselicious is at it again. This time the organisers of the year-long food festival are attempting to break a world record for the world’s biggest Easter egg hunt. To accomplish this, more than 505,000 chocolate eggs (of the Max Havelaar fair-trade variety, no less) will be spread out over 10 parks across Brussels. Young and old are encouraged to take part; it’s free, and the chocolate eggs come in all different flavours. So grab a basket and start hunting! **RB**



8 April, 15.00 | Across Brussels
► www.brusselicious.be

MORE KIDS' ACTIVITIES
THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Picnic at the Neighbours: Bring a picnic and enjoy free drinks, theatre performances and film screenings (ages 4 and up), courtesy of the Youth Film Festival of Flanders
APR 6-13 12.00 on squares across Antwerp
► www.jeugdfilmfestival.be

Bredene (West Flanders)

Easter in Bredene: Easter egg hunt, workshops and entertainment for all ages
APR 7 14.30-17.30 at August Plovieplein
► www.jonginbredene.be

Ghent

Alle klokken groot en klein (All the Bells, Big and Small): Puppet theatre with an Easter theme (ages 3 and up; in Dutch)
APR 4 & 7 14.30 at Het Huis van Alijn, Kraanlei 65
► www.huisvanalijn.be

EXHIBITION

Kris Dewitte: Open Asia

Shooting movie stars and film sets is in Kris Dewitte’s blood. For the past 25 years, the Flemish photographer has captured enough portraits of the *beau monde* of the film world to fill a dozen books. His most recent travels brought him to Asia where he was involved in set photography and responsible for a series of stunning shots of the actors and actresses he encountered there. These colourful works are on display now in Turnhout, in honour of the city’s upcoming film festival Open Doek, celebrating its 20th year. **RB**



Until 30 September | Kunstforum Würth, Turnhout | ► www.wurth.be

MORE EXHIBITIONS THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Chantal Akerman: Too Far, Too Close: The very first large-scale retrospective of the Brussels-born filmmaker and feminist icon’s work
Until JUN 10 at M HKA, Leuvenstraat 32
► www.muhka.be

Knokke-Heist

Photo Festival: Annual international photography festival with indoor and outdoor exhibitions featuring the work of famed photographers from across the world. This year’s theme is Wonderland and includes work by Ruud Van Empel of the Netherlands and American Michael Light
Until JUN 30 across Knokke-Heist
► www.fotofestival.be

Meise

101 Pocket-Sized Trees: To celebrate its 35th anniversary, the Flemish Bonsai Organisation exhibits more than 100 of its most beautiful miniature trees. Bonsai specialist Marc Noelanders will teach a master class and there are also permanent demonstrations for beginners
APR 6-15 at National Botanic Garden, Nieuwelaan 38
► www.plantentuinmeise.be

DUSK TIL DAWN

Katrien Lindemans

Libertine Supersport

13 April
Mirano, Brussels

From October 2009 until January 2012, Libertine Supersport was the hippest venue for electronic music in Brussels. It was even named the best club in Europe by the French *Trax Magazine*. Located at K-Nal, next to the canal in the city centre, it united a couple of hundred party people on Saturday nights.

At the start of 2012, the organisers unexpectedly cancelled all upcoming events, and nobody could tell when or if the club would ever re-open. Last month, Libertine sent out a bunch of mysterious e-mails with the promising message: “Libertine Supersport ... Soon!” How soon, you want to know? Well, mark your agenda for Friday, the 13th(!) of April, for the new and improved Libertine Supersport club night. The event no longer takes place at K-Nal, but at nightclub Mirano. The choice for this location was rather obvious, as Mirano used to host the Dirty Dancing party nights, the predecessor of ... Libertine Supersport. The comeback event on the 13th gathers a few of the Libertine Supersport regular DJs behind the decks: Rick Shiver (*pictured*), A.N.D.Y, Christoph Lefrog, Mickey and Attari. As usual, the line-up features some international DJs as well. Gear up for poppy electro by Punks Jump Up (UK), cosmic electro by Todd Terje (Norway) and more electro beats by Dixon (Germany). The doors open at 23.00. You’ll pay €7 if you arrive before midnight, €12 if after. Another good reason to be on time: A bottle of Lanson champagne costs “only” €50 before 1.00. Pricy, perhaps, but the renewed Libertine parties will only be held once month (on the third Friday), whereas before they were every week, so you can perhaps splurge. Let’s hope Friday the 13th will bring good luck to Libertine Supersport’s second life.

► www.libertinesupersport.be



BITE

Robyn Boyle

Farine's Food ★★☆☆

Contact Bite at flandersbite@gmail.com

Sometimes, though very rarely, you step inside a place and feel right at home. This is Farine's for you: one long wooden table, a grandmotherly open kitchen and plenty of retro knick-knacks. American expat Justine Vanthilt opened this haven for "coffee, croissants and comfort food in Antwerp" only two years ago, but the atmosphere is remarkably worn-in.

And there's a definite tip of the hat to her home country on the menu, which includes both breakfast foods and lunch classics like the BLT (bacon, lettuce and tomato sandwich) and traditional American cheeseburger. My friend's in the mood for an early lunch, I for a late breakfast. So she orders a tuna melt, and I opt for the sunny-side up special. While we're waiting, we sip two double-shot lattes that come with little chocolate brownies.

The tuna melt is two ultra-thick slices of brown organic bread, lightly grilled and covered in a smooth, sweet-sour mixture of tuna, mayo, capers and spring onions with melted cheddar cheese on top. Next to this is a pile of fresh rocket salad, grated carrots and creamy vinaigrette.

I get a basket filled with a crispy croissant and two types of organic bread, perfect for soaking up the golden runny yolks of the two eggs. These come with crispy bacon strips and a glass of fresh-squeezed orange juice, plus another coffee (or tea). Our bill for two is €25.

As it gets closer to noon, the room starts filling up

with lunching colleagues, and we are impressed by the communal feel of the long table. As it turns out, Farine's makes good use of this table during its weekly salons. A salon, according to Wikipedia, is "a gathering of people under the roof of an inspiring host, held partly to amuse one another and partly to refine taste and increase their knowledge of the participants through conversation."

The central idea of Farine's salon is to combine conversation and good food. It begins at 18.30 with a simple drink (wine, beer, cola). At 19.00, people line up for the buffet – two choices, one always vegetarian – and continue serving themselves until the food is gone. At 20.00, everyone orders coffee or tea before switching spots at the table and continuing the conversation.

The topic of the salon changes every week, but it is a consistently lively, engaging and unpredictable evening, as the group consists of (up to 16) expats and locals who are meeting one another for the first time. The cost is €22 per person.

The next salon in English is on 17 April, and the theme will be "Attraction: defining beauty in 2012 and beyond". Reserve your spot in advance with an email to salon@farinesfood.com.

► www.farinesfood.com



- 📍 Vlaamsekaai 40, Antwerp; 0499.75.16.17
- 🕒 Sat-Thurs 8.00-16.00; Fri 8.00-20.30; salons on Tuesday nights
- 💶 €22 per person (salons)
- 📖 Cosy lunch and breakfast café, plus weekly salons fuelling lively conversation

TALKING SPORTS

Leo Cendrowicz

Red Panthers claw their way to Olympics

Better late than never: Last month, the Belgian women's field hockey team reached their first-ever Olympic Games when they thrashed Ireland 4-1 in a qualifier play-off in Beerschot.

Three goals in quick succession from Sofie Gierts and another from Erica Coppey clinched the victory for the Red Panthers, ensuring a trip to London this summer. The win, before a home crowd of 3,000, followed four other play-off games against Spain, France, Russia and Mexico.

It is especially satisfying for 32-year-old Gierts, who has twice quit the national team and twice been persuaded to return by coach Pascal Kina. In the game against Ireland it was Gierts who provided the game's one moment of real class, trapping a ball out of the air and pulling hard to send it low and hard past the Irish keeper.

Although her second goal came as the result of a controversial penalty decision, there was little doubt that Gierts and Belgium had secured a deserved victory.

Antwerp-born Gierts, who is also a coach, has a worldly background as a player, turning out for teams in Madrid and Breda. Coming from a hockey family – her father is part of the national coaching team – Gierts' first club was Ukkel; she has been with the Royal Antwerp Hockey Club since 2010. She may be a full 14 years older than the youngest Red Panther, 18-year-old Alix Gerniers, but her experience has proved invaluable. After the Ireland game, she tweeted a quote from legendary American football coach Vince Lombardi: "It does not matter how many times you get knocked down, but how many times you get up."

The victory marks a stunning turn-around for Belgian hockey. Last summer, the men's team reached the semi-finals of the European hockey championships in Germany: The Red Lions, who had never before reached the final of any major championship, were at one point 2-1 up against the three-time World Cup-winning Netherlands before losing 4-2. The semi-final placing also meant the men qualified automatically for the Olympics.

That means that Belgium, once non-contenders for hockey, can now look forward to cheering for all their red cats in the biggest sports show of the year. And for the Red Panthers, there is more to come next year when they will be hosting the women's European Championships.

► www.hockey.be



The last word...

Money matters

"Not one of Bekaert's workers could save up De Graeve's bonus in a whole lifetime."

Workers at steel-wire manufacturer Bekaert have threatened to strike after a 32% increase in the bonus paid to CEO Bert De Graeve, after the announcement of more than 600 redundancies

Bear necessities

"We're very happy the bears have found such a good home."

Workers at the nature rescue centre in Opglabbeek, Limburg province, last week sent off three maltreated circus bears to a new home in Scotland

Old hands

"Herman Van Rompuy and I are equally humble, but he hides it better than I do."

Veteran Flemish politician Herman De Croo last week marked 44 years in politics

Never too late

"Too bad that my Ivonne can't be here for this. I would have wanted her to see it. She would have been proud of me."

Nand Van Barel of Zwijndrecht will take part in the Belgian billiards cup final in May at the age of 87

NEXT WEEK
IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

If you haven't planned your summer holiday yet, you might consider the Flemish coast. Been there, done that, you say? Not if you haven't seen Beaufort 04, the outstanding triennial of European artists at surprising outdoor locations along the sea, the ports and the city streets

Living

Bruno Pieters is about to launch a new fashion label that will tell you exactly how much the clothes cost to manufacture. For the first time, you'll be able to compare what they spend with what you spend. We talk to the Flemish designer about the controversial new initiative

Arts

Nineteenth-century author Hendrik Conscience is beloved among the Flemish and not just because he penned *The Lion of Flanders*, a novel set against the backdrop of the great Battle of the Golden Spurs in 1302. This year is the 100th anniversary of his birth, and we'll tell you what Antwerp – the city in which he was born – has in mind for the occasion.