

Students find 'PR-flower'

Minsk forum gathers over 500 future PR specialists

By Anton Ivanenko

The Belarusian State University's Institute of Journalism recently welcomed over 500 young guests: future PR specialists and press service officers (from Belarus, Russia, Ukraine and Lithuania). The 5th Open Student's Forum: *PR-Flower — 2012* was a four-day event organised exclusively by fourth year students from the Information and Communication Department. They found and invited partners and sponsors, while organising round table discussions, training sessions and conferences (as part of their curriculum).

"The first forum — which took place in 2008 — had more of an educational character. We had then to explain how PR differs from advertising and marketing, as participants knew little," explains the Head of the Technology of Communication Department at the Belarusian State University's Institute of Journalism, Irina Sidorskaya. "Now, the level of understanding of guests has grown significantly. Of course, we still have an educational role but the event has mostly transformed into a venue for experience exchange. We not only teach



Students manage to distinguish themselves with their PR projects

but also learn from others."

PR has always tended to be viewed by the public as something necessary following a celebrity scandal! In reality, companies use the media to promote a concept or product to the public. Specialists attended the forum, aiming to teach students how to work with the media to

shape a company's image, react to crisis situations and use social networks. Each branch uses PR in a particular way, varying between the spheres of sport, education, culture and show business. Of course, the idea is different in reality from studying via books. This year, specialists from the Russian PR Academy were

invited to share experience but, sadly, failed to attend in person; they communicated with students by Skype — lecturing and answering questions.

Forum participants offered their projects for guests' judgment, so that the most interesting can be given the opportunity to be realised.

Last year, 3rd year student Olga Gerasenko proposed her own concept for Belavia National Airline's image: highly praised by experts, Olga is now a PR specialist at Belavia. Many other similar examples exist. "This student forum is like an audition for future PR specialists," says the Director of the Belarusian PR Institute,

Natalia Gromadskikh. "The event is attended not only by PR officers but by heads of leading Belarusian companies who are keen to see promising future employees. It's no easy task to set up such an event but the Technology of Communication Department has succeeded."

Foreign guests also highlighted the high level of the forum. Among them was a delegation from Tambov, who viewed the event as a worthy rival to similar such actions organised in Russia. "We often visit conferences of this kind but only in Russian cities: Moscow, St. Petersburg, or Barnaul," explained one Tambov State Technical University student, Lyudmila Pestich. "It's our first time in Belarus. We've arrived with a social project devoted to working with Great Patriotic War veterans."

"I believe that this conference offers the opportunity to gain experience," agrees Irina Miloserdova. "Such forums are a good way to build the image of a country, university or chair. Returning to Russia, we'll definitely tell others of your city and your people. Such events are an opportunity for guests to learn more about Belarus."

Favourable conditions in the north

First agro-tourist complex planned for Vitebsk Region's Rossony and Polotsk districts

The venue for the first Belarusian agro-tourist resort has been chosen carefully, being the site of the first homesteads in the Republic. Their owners have been liaising well and — with support from a public association — annually

organise the *Zaborski Fest* festival of rural tourism.

As the Deputy Minister for Sports and Tourism, Cheslav Shulga, notes, the resort should be able to attract tourists not only in summer but in autumn and spring, offering accommodation in rural homesteads and agro-tourist complexes (built as clusters). Mr. Shul-

ga notes that Belarus also plans to give neglected mansions to investors (those in disuse or being used for the wrong purpose). "We've agreed with the Culture Ministry and local authorities to offer family mansions for symbolic payment only, on terms of investment for tourist purposes for at least five years," he adds.

Abandoned villages reviving

By Andrey Anufriev

Abandoned villages to be offered for use as tourist objects almost free of charge

There are many villages in Belarus which are almost deserted. "This is especially common for the northern regions of Vitebsk and Grodno, where villages exist in great numbers," noted the Deputy Minister for Sports and Tourism, Cheslav Shulga, on meeting a delegation from the Krasnodar Krai (which visited Belarus to learn from its experience).

Due to people's ageing, 12 villages in the Braslav District alone are no longer considered to be true settlements, lacking a large enough population. "We're working on finding investors for such villages, who'll pay a symbolic fee to be able to transform them into tourist sites," Mr. Shulga tells us.

Some willing buyers have al-



Nesluch village at Lake Naroch becomes centre of ancient culture

ready come forward in the Vitebsk Region's Rossony District and in the Minsk Region's Kopyl District. Abandoned and existing villages are to be made available. Mr. Shulga mentions one Belarusian businessman who made money in the Len-

ingrad Region but has now bought a Belarusian village in the Pruzhany District (where his mother used to live), to establish a tourist complex there. "Moreover, he has invested huge sums in the development of a sports complex," added Mr. Shulga.

Four generations to gather for forum

By Olga Kurlovskaya

Belarus is the first CIS state to host the International *Destruction of Cities and Villages in Europe during WWII Congress*, notes Larisa Katkova, a leading research officer at the Belarusian State Museum of Great Patriotic War History and co-ordinator of the congress for Belarus

The 4th International *Destruction of Cities and Villages in Europe during WWII Congress* is being organised in mid-May at the Belarusian State Museum of Great Patriotic War History. "For the first time within the CIS, the event is being hosted by the country which suffered the greatest loss during the struggle against Fascism. Ten states have already confirmed their participation in the congress, with over 80 applications received (half from Western European and CIS states)," emphasises Ms. Katkova.

The event is organised in Europe at Germany's initiative every two years. It first took place in 2006 in Germany and, in 2008, the Czech Republic hosted the event. It then took place in Slovakia in 2010. This year, the event includes a conference entitled *Civil Population in War* — dedicated to mutual understanding and peaceful co-existence of nations.



Burnt villages

The event is unique in inviting young people to take part in its second stage (the first features historians, political analysts, sociologists, lawyers and museum employees). The second will see students discussing the *Youth and Children during WWII* topic, while some will receive awards for a contest previously organised for those aged 12-16 for the best drawing, literary and multimedia projects.

"Four generations will meet at the forum: veterans of the Great Patriotic War and witnesses of the Nazis' destruction of settlements, the middle-aged, students and children," adds Ms. Katkova.