

City takes on new features

By Marina Nosovskaya

'Reading' sculpture to be unveiled in Gomel to mark Year of Books

At the beginning of the year, the city's authorities announced a contest to design a range of sculptural compositions, with 'Reading' among the nominations. Several applications were forthcoming, with a Gomel sculptor chosen for his representation of a young man seated in a relaxed pose, reading enthusiastically. It is to be unveiled near Gomel's Regional Universal Library.

Other sculptures chosen include 'Lynx', 'The Longest Bench in Belarus', 'Fisherman' and 'A Dedication to the 100th Anniversary of Belarusian Football'. These will grace the city very soon.

Ministry for Digital Society Issues — a good idea

Belarus is keen to develop liaisons with the World Information Technology and Services Alliance (WITSA), notes Belarus' Prime Minister, Mikhail Myasnikovich, on meeting WITSA Secretary General, James Poisant, in Minsk

According to the PM, ICT is a priority for Belarus, with the Government providing assistance to its development. The country has created necessary infrastructure for IT companies at the High-Tech Park, with specialists being successfully trained. Their experience and services are in demand across the world.

At present, IT is being launched into Belarusian medicine, transport and other spheres, in addition to the *E-Government* project. "We offer good employment prospects and have many foreign contracts," stresses Mr. Myasnikovich, discussing prospects for WITSA partnership.

Mr. Poisant has told journalists that he primarily aims to familiarise himself with the IT industry in Belarus on this visit. "We've already begun working with representatives of the Belarusian IT branch, liaising with the High-Tech Park and Infopark Association — which is a member of our organisation," he notes. He believes that Belarus boasts huge potential in the sphere of information and communication technologies, while possessing the necessary infrastructure, education system and intellectual opportunities. He adds, "I've visited three companies involved in software development; you have the potential but need to develop it further. I hope to see young people building their careers in this industry, as we live in an age of digital technologies." Mr. Poisant is convinced that long-term development of the branch is necessary for further growth of Belarusian IT and has suggested the setting up of a separate ministry in Belarus to oversee IT issues — as seen in various other countries.

Salty cure for asthma

Treatments at a depth of 420 metres help alleviate asthma, neurodermatitis and hay fever, at Soligorsk-based Republican Hospital of Speleotherapy — run by Belaruskali



Patients enjoy Republican Hospital of Speleotherapy



By Alla Martinkevich

The air is a bio-active cocktail of sodium, potassium and magnesium ions, helping those with respiratory problems. Known across the CIS, huge numbers are keen to attend, while the facility, of course, has limitations. However, an extra 440 square metre underground ward has been added, raising the number of children treated annually from 400 to around 1400.

Following the President's working visit to Soligorsk this summer, two instructions were given: to expand the speleo-hospital's recuperative premises and to ensure their full use. Recently, large numbers of children have

begun to arrive.

It takes just a minute to descend and pass through the long tunnels to reach the site. The interior of the salt mine is impressive, with grand arc-shaped domes and salt layers which resemble those of a cake. A group of 25 children arrive and it takes them just 20 minutes to adapt before they can begin dancing, or playing chess, volleyball or table tennis. Those wishing to sleep for a while can take a nap in a comfortable sling-chair in special rooms, while others can take a run in the salt cave.

Alisa Tarnavskaya, from Gomel, has been suffering from asthma for nine years, with attacks becoming more violent of



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late. She keeps her inhalator with her at all times, as well as taking strong medication. However, after six sessions in the Soligorsk cave, doctors stress that this young patient has become more light-hearted, having put her asthma attacks behind her. Alisa admits that she was afraid to descend into the cave at first but now smiles, "It's like a delightful walk. We love to dance and can play tennis

here. Sometimes I just sleep."

Head Doctor Pavel Levchenko takes us on a tour of the hospital, explaining, "The allergic form of spasmodic asthma is that best treated here, with 99 percent of patients experiencing fewer attacks. In half of our cases, symptoms fully disappear. The salt cave normalises people's level of histamine (causing inflammation)." Just 12 sessions (of 3 hours each) are enough to treat painful coughs, neurosis and, even, depression.

The special micro-climate is the key, with its constant temperature of around 16 degrees and its gas composition, alongside low air humidity and its saturation with negative ions. Moreover, the site is free from electro-magnetic emissions and the air is much cleaner than that in the usual operating room. There are no dangerous micro-organisms, as they can't exist in the salt cave; nor is there any dust or other substance which might cause hypersensitivity. Fine airborne particles of salt help the lungs release phlegm, aiding the functioning of the respiratory system while strengthening the nervous system; a spell in the underground salt 'baths' is both relaxing and an effective form of recuperation.

According to specialists, around 37,000 Belarusians would benefit from immediate salt treatment — including 10,000 children. The Soligorsk caves attract patients from Kazakhstan, Russia, Ukraine and the Baltic States, with demand greatly exceeding capacity until the new ward was constructed. Now, the situation is changing drastically, enabling 250 people to be accommodated at any one time (against 127 in the past).