

The art of weaving continues

Weaving traditions handed down from one generation of weavers to the next in Brest Region

By Irina Andreeva

A colleague of mine recently visited Belarus' Brest Region and was impressed to see local treasures near busy highways much cared for by enthusiasts. The songs, dances and clothes of past generations are cherished tenderly, allowing today's youngsters to know past customs, as well as modern pop and rap trends.

The Malorita District uses unique patterns and makes unusual headwear (called a 'plat' and well known countrywide). Ethnographers have written many monographs on the subject, while exhibitions often feature the local brightly woven dresses, skirts and aprons, rescued from private wardrobes. The District Folk Arts Centre has decided to revive local traditional patterns, so that their beauty can be appreciated.

Stepanida Stepanyuk, 77, lives in the village of Doropeevichi, and is skilled in the old ways of weaving and embroidery. She still remembers the patterns and methods used by her mother and granny. She now works at the Folk Arts Centre, heading the amateur weaving club, where children are taught on the Centre's loom. There is even one adult pupil.

Stepanida always sings while weaving, causing pupils of other clubs to pause and listen. Even she

has no idea how many folk songs she remembers; they simply spring to mind as she works. She is a local celebrity without intention.

A documentary film was once shot about Stepanida, featuring Minsk singer Vitaly Prokopovich, who performed a Polesie song from Stepanida's repertoire: *Saint Month*. He recorded it in modern style and youngsters often choose it as their ringtone. Many pop stars would envy such popularity.

The Centre underwent

repairs recently and has installed mannequins in the entrance hall, to welcome all visitors. Their costumes were collected from villages across the Malorita District over the past two decades and are mostly red and white, with rose patterns prevailing, as is traditional. They are a delight for the eyes. Truly, many songs

have been sung in their making. Meanwhile, the children have woven napkins, scarves and kerchiefs for display and Stepanida recently wove cloth to make skirts for a famous Brest ensemble: *Radost* (Joy). Her tapestry style weaving hides all the warp threads (known as 'woven by sheath').

No holiday is possible without songs, as the village of Khotislav knows. Its children's ensemble, *Krynichka* (Spring),

lives in the village of Khotislav, Galina Khomik. She's also recorded local legends, to help her young artists understand their rich local history — through dance and song.

This year, *Krynichka* has taken part in the Republican *Beraginya* Festival, presenting songs, dances and theatrical scenes from Khotislav District legends. Once wearing their national costumes, the youngsters have a wonderful time.

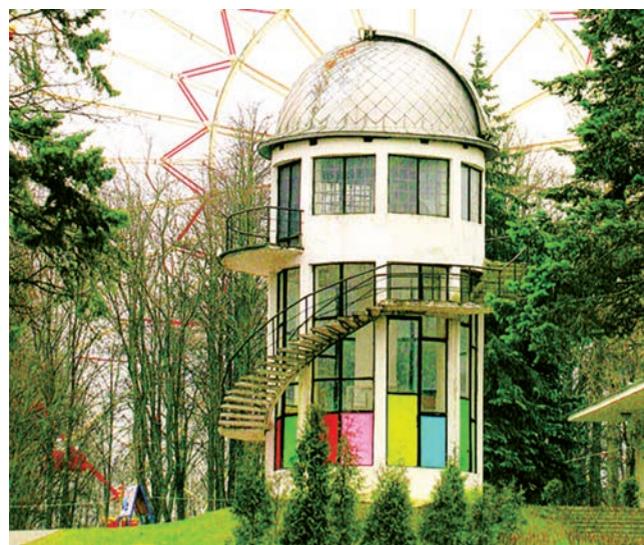
An amateur embroidery club also operates in Khotislav, led by Galina Benyasyuk, reproducing the traditional motifs of birds, flowers, figures and roses — as known to their grannies. Boys and girls alike enjoy the work, which goes on display when completed, for all to see and delight in.

Of course, the patterns and motifs depicted on Belarusian national costumes hold symbolic meaning, with each village having its own customs. Patterns on clothes once indicated people's true origin and ceremonial napkins were traditionally buried with their owner, being thought to encapsulate the identity of the person. Not long ago, an older woman asked that she should be buried in her mother's traditional costume, so that she would be recognised correctly in Heaven.



Craftswoman Stepanida Stepanyuk displays her great-grandmother's skirt, which is over 100 years old

Stars ever closer



Observatory may soon open in Minsk

Group of enthusiasts plan to repair Minsk Planetarium's observatory: in disuse for 15 years

The restoration project is being funded as a result of the *Social Weekend* contest, which provides grants for socially important projects. Winners are chosen by public vote and jury opinion.

Minsk Planetarium opened in 1965, offering day and evening astronomic observations; it was the most interesting amusement in the city's park and gave many their first (and only) taste of astronomic knowledge, marking the path to other sciences.

In 1995, the observatory was closed for technical reasons but, from 2009 to 2010, a group of amateur astronomers attempted to restore the building, mending the telescope pipe and making internal repairs to the building. In autumn 2009, the observatory even hosted observations.

Now, new mechanisms are being installed, allowing day and evening observations for the public. Alexander Mikulich, who heads Minsk Planetarium, notes that an organisation has been found to investigate the soundness of the building and that the observatory may become operational this year if stable financing is provided.

Friendly meeting of all tribes

By Olga Avdeeva

Scouts gather near Polotsk, from across Commonwealth of Independent States

More than 200 scouts from Belarus, Russia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and

Armenia have gathered for the *Scout Jamboree of Belarus*, aged from 8 to 17 years.

The jamboree (translated from American Indian as 'meeting of all tribes') celebrated the 25th anniversary of the Belarusian

Republican Scout Association. Its members currently number over a thousand and the organisation has enrolled about 30,000 people since its inception.

The nine day camping expedition to the banks of Lake Suya included a fes-

tival of cultures, the big scout game 'Great Polotsk', the Day of Great Water, competitions to make and sail water vessels, a camp fire game of 'Cranes and Spots', kayaking and various other sporting competitions.

Genuine craftsmanship skills last through many centuries

Lighting technicians from Lida create real masterpieces

Have you ever seen a chandelier the size of a three-story house? Do you know that the number of wax candles lit was once a sign of wealth and that an ordinary nobleman could not afford a bronze chandelier, which cost about the same as a house in St. Petersburg? Kaskad enterprise in Lida may surprise you not only with historic facts but with its work.

Twelve years ago, the site was a waste ground; now, it boasts the latest high-tech manufacture and is the only such enterprise in the country manufacturing exclusive chandeliers and reproduction antique lamps. Those



Unique chandelier from Lida

who have visited restored Nesvizh Castle will have marvelled at how precisely restorers reproduced the spirit of the ancient Radziwiłł residence, with lamps play-

ing a vital role; its unique candelabra and chandeliers (candles decorating everywhere) were made by Lida masters. Their works also decorate the National Aca-

demic Bolshoi Opera and Ballet Theatre of the Republic of Belarus, the National Library, and Stolitsa shopping mall.

Enterprises making huge chandeliers to order are located in Spain, Italy and Austria but our Belarusian masters can match, and even, surpass their craftsmanship.

A huge chandelier was recently made in Lida for the cultural-exhibition centre in Smolensk, while a 2m drop chandelier has also been made for the medieval Russian New Jerusalem Monastery, in the Moscow Region, as Sergey Gerasimovich, the Deputy Director of Kaskad JSC, tells us.