

# Brand name of boat master

Nikolay Yurkevich keeps traditions of wooden boat building for three decades

By Sergey Muravsky

On asking the first person I met on the outskirts of Braslav, near the lake, it wasn't difficult to find out where the boats are made. They directed straight towards the farmstead, which is surrounded by timber boards and mountains of shavings. A special trestle holds a construction rather like the skeleton of a fish and over this, I found Nikolay Yurkevich, bent in concentration. Before my eyes, he worked magic with axe and plane, turning the 'skeleton' into a boat.

Mr. Yurkevich has earned his reputation as a master following 35 years of boat building: some as 'work horses' for fishermen and others as elegant pleasure boats for wealthy customers. How many has he made over the decades? He long ago lost count but more than a third of those in the dry dock at Lake Drivyaty were made by his hand. They number hundreds.

## From 'ship's boy' to 'captain'

As I ask questions, Nikolay Pavlovich continues working, answering with some deliberation. Occasionally, he strokes his grey beard, pushes a lock of hair from his forehead, or sets his cap straight.

"When did my hobby begin? While I was at sea, I think. I studied, worked and then entered the army, before going to sea. After five years on the waves, visiting Africa, Canada, America and Cuba, I knew about ships! I was very interested in them, studying in my free time. I remember wondering how this piece of iron managed to keep afloat and began to notice the edges, bracing, covering and ballast. Each had its place, supporting the others."

After his 'long-swim', the Master returned to Braslav, where he had grown up, having moved there with his parents as a child, in 1950. He did not forget the water though, being able to see Lake Drivyaty from his window (one of the biggest of the local lakes). Of course, where there is water, there are boats, so he soon made a decision -

quiries with the boat-building carpenters, sharing his own knowledge with them.

"At that time, those 'seniors' called me a greenhorn," he smiles, continuing with his plane along the bottom of the boat, producing long, golden shavings. Nikolay bends down to survey his work and runs his hand over the surface. "They laughed at me a little, saying, 'Oh, greenhorn, what can you understand?' They only looked at me differently when I began to speak with some understanding and make useful remarks."

His current work is a commission from the Braslav Lakes National Park, to be used for commer-

cial fishing. He tells me that it'll be strong enough to dance upon without fear of capsizing, regardless of the number of nets or the strength of the wind or waves. He is long past making errors of judgement.

## Dugout which cannot be forged

Today, the Master has his own style and, like all experts, he jealously keeps his secrets, willing to pass them on only to his pupils, in order that they might continue his legacy. Sadly, he is yet to acquire such pupils, which worries him. Few boast his skills and knowledge; it's a dying art. Some might question whether we need such

expertise, since modern technologies use aluminium and fibre-glass. However, traditional wooden boats remain revered by true sailors, despite being heavy and bulky and in need of regular maintenance. They are reliable and silent, which is appreciated by hunters and fishermen, who are growing in number annually.

Nikolay continues working, knowing the value of his vocation. There's little he doesn't understand about boats. His own are instantly recognisable, having a nail driven into the bottom in a certain place, between the boards. It is impossible to remove, so its head is his calling card.



Nikolay Yurkevich 'fiddles' with his next work

## Farmstead residents to speak English

UNDP to allocate almost \$500,000 to finance Belarusian ecotourism projects

In total, 30 mini-grants of \$15,000 are to be allocated, with local initiatives chosen by contest. More than 90 applications have been submitted, on the theme of creating eco-tourist infrastructure and self-development projects.

Statistical accounting will allow us to objectively estimate tourist flow at various sites, as part of the *Local Business and Economic Development* project, overseen by the National Statistical Committee.

The project pays particular attention to training of eco-tourist employees in the spheres of marketing, management, interpersonal communications, and the running of small and medium-sized businesses. Forty people are to be chosen for training, which will include foreign trips to the EU. Candidates will be announced in February, 2014, with computer and foreign languages courses organised for owners of farmsteads and other eco-tourism representatives.

## As if in the same room

MTS Company introduces HD Voice standard for first time in Belarus

HD Voice technology expands the spectrum of transmission frequencies for the voice, allowing broadcasting of unique components characterising each voice, which are usually lost. The new technology allows callers to feel that they are in the same room as the speaker. It also neutralises



During presentation

background noise, making it easier to be heard in noisy locations — such as on a main street, or at a stadium or concert.

The technology raises the recognition of such sounds as 'S' and 'F', and discerns the difference between 'M' and 'N', and 'P' and 'T' during conversation. Many modern mobile phones support HD Voice technology, which aims to improve the quality of calls — especially those made between different countries. No special options are required on your mobile device and the technology does not influence battery charge, or create an additional load on the network.

Belarus is the 62nd country to implement HD Voice technology.

# Championship with all comforts

Ticket counters for foreigners to appear at railway stations in Minsk and Brest during World Ice Hockey Championship, being hosted this year by the Belarusian capital

By Sergey Smirnov

Ticket counters are to operate at Minsk-Passazhirsky station and at Brest-Tsentralny station in the city of Brest, alongside round-the-clock co-ordination centres, helping passengers to find their way around the rail network. About 20 volunteers are to work at Minsk-Passazhirsky station to help visitors: all with a good knowledge of foreign languages. From 1st January, 2014, the information board at Minsk-Passazhirsky also gives



Buying tickets soon to be even easier for foreign tourists visiting stations

information in English.

Announcements on the arrival and departure of international and urban trains will be made in Eng-

lish, Belarusian and Russian at stations in Minsk, Brest and Grodno during the World Ice Hockey Championship. In addition, staff

will be using specialised phrase books containing appropriate vocabulary and booking clerks, announcers, workers in information bureaus and others occupied in the sphere of customer service are taking English lessons.

A uniform travel ticket is to be launched for the duration of the World Ice Hockey Championship, allowing passengers to take any form of public transport in Minsk — buses, trolley buses, trams and the metro — as well as city line trains.