



# Newsletter

February 2014

## Newcastles of the World

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## Register now for our Conference!

<http://www.newcastlesconferences.com>

The special website for the Conference, 28 April – May 4, has been updated including the full programme, registration form, details on venue, accommodation, and fees.

Mayor Vladimir Kokr and his conference team in host town Nové Hradý, Czech Republic have prepared a programme that not only includes workshops and discussions, but also cultural events and excursions to learn more about the historic town, its surroundings and the heritage of South Bohemia and the Czech Republic.

This also includes a visit to the capital Prague, to World Heritage Site Cesky Krumlov, and to the fellow municipality of Nové Hradý in Eastern Bohemia.

# OYEZ, OYEZ!



THE distinctive sound of a town crier shouting 'oyez, oyez' has returned to Newcastle-under-Lyme for the first time in 30 years. Community-spirited Gordon Brayford put on Dickensian costume to ring the bell before making his first proclamation in the town's historic Ironmarket.

Stunned shoppers watched as he announced the opening of a new Indian restaurant. Gordon said: "I've lived in the Newcastle area all my life and it makes me immensely proud to take on this role". He was chosen through an X-Factor-style contest to find a town crier last September. The previous crier Frank Shufflebotham won the town crier world championship in Canada in 1979.

The cost of Gordon's costume was met by Newcastle Civic Society. The competition to find a town crier was thought up by Newcastle Town Centre Partnership and supported by Newcastle Borough Council. Town centre manager Matt Taylor said: "It's fantastic to have him in town as I think it will add something having such a historic figure return to the streets.



## OUR TIME TO SHINE- SPECIAL OLYMPICS

Newcastle, New South Wales played host to the first ever Special Olympics Asia Pacific Games in December, with more than 2,000 athletes from 32 countries taking part. It's not to be confused with the Paralympics, but the Special Olympics offers Olympic-style individual and team sports that provide meaningful training and competition opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities.



The participants competed in Athletics, Badminton, Bocce, Basketball, Cricket, Football, Table Tennis, Ten Pin Bowling and Swimming. A two hour Opening Ceremony spectacular of music, dance and fireworks was held at Hunter Stadium, featuring a who's who of Australian music including Marcia Hines, Anthony Callea, Iva Davies, The McClymonts, Doug Parkinson and Marina Prior. Special Olympics is the world's largest sports organisation for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, providing year-round training and competitions to more than 4.2 million athletes in 170 countries.



# Local Elections in Neuburg

Councillor **Walter Friemal** writes: On March 16 local elections will be held in most Bavarian communities. In Neuburg so far 5 parties have published their lists of candidates: the CSU (Christian Social Union, the equivalent of the CDU in the rest of Germany, a conservative party), the SPD (Socialist Party Deutschland, the "German" Labour party), the FW ("Free Voters", an independent party), the FDP (the Liberal party) and the Green Party.

At the moment the CSU is represented by 15 councillors, the SPD by 6, the FW by 6, the FDP by 2 and the Green Party by one councillor. The term of the new council will begin on May 1, 2014, and end on April 30, 2018.

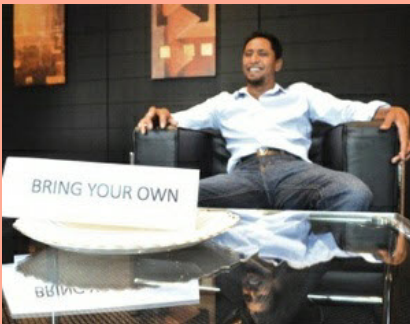
The voting system in Bavaria is a very complicated one. Each voter has 30 votes, which can be distributed across the ballot paper, choosing candidates of all the five parties and give each candidate up to three votes maximum. You can also tick only one party, which then means that each candidate of this party will get one vote. On a second ballot paper you choose your candidate for mayor. In the past two elections (2002 and 2008) Mr **Bernhard Gmehling** (pictured right) won the election, in 2008 with a majority of over 70%. This time there will be five candidates, with Mr Gmehling trying to win the race for a third time.



At the same time the voters will cast their votes for the Kreistag (the District Council consisting of 60 members, i.e. each voter has 60 votes) and the Landrat (Head of the District Council) on an extra ballot paper. The ballot paper for the Kreistag is roughly the size of a towel.! Counting the votes will take about one and a half day. The result of who is elected into the town council and the district council will be published late in the afternoon on March 17. Who will represent the town as mayor or the district for the next six years will be announced on Sunday evening, at about 8 pm."

## Newcastle KZN top for efficiency

Newcastle, Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa has won national recognition as a model of cost-cutting success. Not only has the municipality no debt - having borrowed nothing for three years - but its economy is booming at 10% growth and its government could manage for over nine months even if it didn't receive anything in rates and taxes. And it's the only town in KwaZulu-Natal where councillors and staff have elected to ban free lunches for themselves!



When local newspaper "The Witness" visited a council meeting in Newcastle last week it reported that councillors were found with their own lunch boxes or take-away meals in plastic bags. There was not a single photocopied page in sight. Instead, all 61 councillors simply referred to agendas on their laptops or iPads. Mayor Afzul Rehman said that Newcastle was "the first paperless government - at any level - in South Africa; and one of only a few in the world. We saved 8m rand this year just by getting rid of paper agendas".

And, unlike neighbouring municipalities, the cost to ratepayers since June last year was "zero" for feeding and entertaining councillors, following a decision in March to ban publicly-funded catering. Instead, the 61 councillors and 30 management committee officials opted to chip in R100 from their salaries for each catered meeting scheduled, and to bring their own lunch boxes to additional meetings. Mayor Rehman said the rest of the municipality had since followed suit: "It's the easiest thing to cut, and we as politicians have to set the tone".

Meanwhile, Newcastle has scooped a string of awards in recent months, including prizes for KwaZulu-Natal's best performing mayor again; its greenest town; and the best shopping mall in South Africa, following a R500m investment in its new major retail centre.

The Mayor highlighted telephone bills as the next target to be axed. He said cheap technologies like Skype and VOIP could save R2m in the coming year - and questioned his own IT staff for racking up phone bills "in this day and age". "This is unnecessary - especially for IT people!" said Mayor Rehman. "There's too much technology out there for us to be using telephones."

## The Walk of Fame on Newcastle's Quayside

Twenty of the Newcastle upon Tyne area's most notable and inspiring people have been chosen by the public to have their names cast in bronze for a Hollywood-style 'walk of fame'.

Former England football manager Sir Bobby Robson; famous singer Sting; television personalities Ant and Dec; Great North Run founder and Olympic medallist Brendan Foster; Paralympics gold medallist Stephen Miller; footballer Alan Shearer; founder of the famous Barbour clothing company Dame Margaret Barbour; and Nobel Prize-winning physicist and discoverer of the "God Particle" Professor Peter Higgs, are among the sons and daughters of the Newcastle area who will have their names immortalised at the heart of one of the most popular visitor attractions, the Quayside.

"Local Heroes" will take the form of a series of bronze plaques placed around the Newcastle and Gateshead Quaysides. It will honour current and past individuals from the area, or with strong links, who have made a big contribution to Newcastle and Gateshead or the wider world over the last 60 years.





# 150th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Switzerland and Japan

Didier Burkhalter, then Mayor of Neuchâtel led his city's delegation to the inaugural Newcastle Summit in Shinshiro, Japan in 1998. Mr Burkhalter is now the President of Switzerland and has returned to Japan to lead the 150th anniversary celebrations of the Treaty of Amity and Commerce between Japan and Switzerland which was signed back in 1864.

The President launched the festivities with the opening of "Swissdays", a multifaceted four-day event held in Tokyo. The vice mayor of Shinshiro, Mr. Yasunobu Hirose attended the official dinner. Didier Burkhalter met the vice- mayor and gave him a present and a symbolic message of friendship from the city of Neuchâtel .

In parallel, in Neuchâtel , the Ethnographic Museum hosted a memorial ceremony attended by Mr. Yukihiro Nikaido , Minister and Chargé d'Affaires of the Embassy of Japan in Switzerland and Ms. Kaori Tahara , president of the Japanese School of Neuchâtel.

Mr Burkhalter grew up in the village of Auvernier on the shores of Lake Neuchâtel, and studied at the University of Neuchâtel. He was elected to the executive (town council) of Neuchâtel in 1991, which he chaired for three legislative periods (1994/1995, 1998/1999, 2001/2002). He remained a member of the council until 2005. He was elected to the Federal Council in September 2009 and appointed as head of the Federal Department of Home Affairs and, subsequently Foreign Affairs.



Didier Burkhalter and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe

## Reception in Neuchâtel for the President of the Swiss Confederation



Triumphal reception by the people upon his arrival in Neuchâtel.



Official ceremony, with the participation of choirs and a youth orchestra.

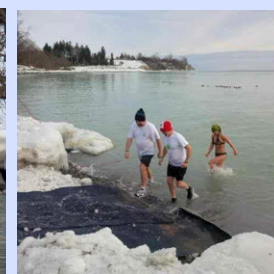
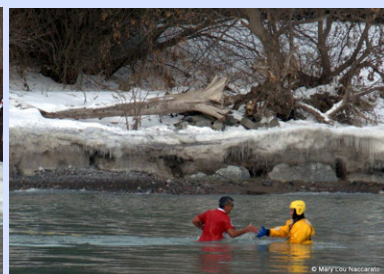
A week after his election as President of the Swiss Confederation, son of Neuchâtel Didier Burkhalter was welcomed, with great ceremony, back to the city, this being a tradition for new Presidents.

## A chilly experience in Newcastle, Ontario

In Canada "Polar Bear Swims", "Plunges", or "Dips", are a New Year's Day tradition in numerous communities across the country. The annual Clarington Polar Bear Swim in chilly Lake Ontario was held on January 1 at the Newcastle Old Bond Head beachfront in temperatures of -20 (with wind chill). The dip is held to raise awareness for the urgent need for organ and tissue donation and to raise money for the Sick Kids Foundation for research into paediatric liver disease, raising \$70,000. Thanks to Mary Lou Naccarato for the words/photos.

Mayor Adrian Foster posted on Facebook: "I started the new year in Bond Head again this year, thought it would be nice to go for a quick dip. A really, really quick dip! I admit it, quickest Polar Bear Dip that I've done, no diving this year! Willie (Newcastle Councillor Willie Woo) did a few laps of the lake. Good fun, good cause. Really cold this year!"

Ontario was suffering the worst ice storm in decades, with power cuts for over a week for tens of thousands of people.





# Jaunpils' "Youth in Action" Programme



Jaunpils Municipality, Latvia, together with the "Coalition of Youth Leaders" began cooperation with municipalities in Spain and Italy in the area of youth policy in 2012. The cooperation was successful, and the outcome is an interesting project "European Commission Working Simulation".

The overall objective of the project is the promotion of the active participation of young people in democratic life and to increase their awareness of the European context in which they live. In December, eight young people from Jaunpils went to Reggio Calabria, Italy. Together with young people from Italy and Spain they collaborated - using the simulation tool - on the work of the European Commission, having the chance to deep their knowledge about important issues such as social inclusion and youth unemployment. All project participants reported positive outcomes, new experience and impressions, and the most important thing - making new friends.

During February the young people will open a photo exhibition about the project in Jaunpils Secondary school, in the Regional Development Centre and in the municipal offices. In March they will meet politicians over coffee to discuss how to build on the project and involve more young people.



## A fascinating history

Almost 20 years ago Inta Dislere, together with Jaunpils museum specialists Ligija Rutka and Zinta Arika began working on a book about the town. They researched in archives, libraries, museums in Latvia and abroad, collected people's memories, photos etc, and they've created a fascinating history, through 700 years, from the 13th century, of the manor houses and county estates that make up the town of Jaunpils and its area. This unique historical research tells the story of Jaunpils in more than 400 pages and 200 photos. The book, which was published at the end of December, was financed by Jaunpils Council. Chairwoman of Jaunpils Municipality Ligita Gintere said: "This long-awaited and long-cherished book about Jaunpils history is now in our hands. We are very proud of it!"



## Directly-elected Mayor for Akhaltsikhe

Under a new bill on local self-government just adopted by the Georgian Parliament, the mayor of Akhaltsikhe can now be directly elected by citizens, for the first time. The bill provides that only those cities that are considered regional centres will initially have self-governing status. Among those cities is Akhaltsikhe, the capital of the region of Samtskhe-Javakheti, with a population of 45,000. About 40% of the population are Armenians, and the new arrangements are expected to strengthen the rights of minorities. Regional governors will be appointed by the national government but regional councils will be established consisting of mayors and municipality heads of the cities or municipalities of these particular regions.

## More direct flights from Kota Bharu

The year got off to a good start for Kota Bharu, our Malaysian member of the alliance of Newcastles of the World. In addition to the national programme to attract as many tourists to visit Malaysia, Kota Bharu has its own strategies to lure more people to visit. Kota Bharu's Sultan Ismail Petra Airport is one of the busiest airports on the eastern part of the Malaysian peninsula, with direct flights daily from Kota Bharu to the capital of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, and also offering flights to Johor Bahru (the gateway to Singapore), Penang and Kota Kinabalu. There's tough competition from four major airlines company in Malaysia, the Malaysia Airlines, Air Asia, Firefly and Malindo, but the sky's the limit.



The city is looking for more tourists to visit Kota Bharu in the first quarter of 2014 as the Visit Malaysia Year 2014 began on 1st January 2014. The latest direct flights now will be introduced as early in March 2014 with two new destinations: Bangkok, Thailand by Firefly Airlines and Kuching, East Malaysia by AirAsia. "It is likely that Kota Bharu will now become better known to the world in near future" says Azman Mohddaham, Public Relations Director of Kota Bharu Municipal Council "This is Kota Bharu, the cradle of Malay culture, rich in history, heritage and culture. Malaysia is truly Asia and Kota Bharu is truly Malaysia!"



It has been announced that the **international tourism promotion forum** will be held in Kota Bharu from June 15 to June 19 2014 at Grand River View Hotel. The Tourism Promotion organization (TPO) is a non - governmental agency based in Busan Korea with eleven countries comprising 78 major cities across Asia Pacific This is a great opportunity for Kota Bharu to welcome the world. The main strategies of the TPO is to promote member's cities through various activities such as forum, seminars, students exchange programmes and travel trade fairs. "Of course members of the Newcastles of the World are most welcome as guests to join the forum this June and further details will be made available soon" says Azman. The main theme for the forum is the concept of Islamic Tourism.

## Newcastles of the World



There are more than 100 different "Newcastles" or "New Castles" around the globe, in many different countries and in different languages. It was the mayor of one of them, in Shinshiro, Japan, who took the initiative to bring the Newcastles together via the Newcastles of the World summit in 1998. Subsequent gatherings were held in Switzerland 2000, USA 2002, South Africa 2004 and 2010, UK 2006 (Newcastle-under-Lyme) and 2012 (Newcastle upon Tyne) and Germany in 2008. Akhaltsikhe (Georgia), Nové Hradý (Czech Republic), Jaunpils (Latvia), Newcastle, Ontario (Canada) and Newcastle, New South Wales (Australia) attended for the first time in 2012. The aim of Newcastles of the World is to foster links of friendship, culture, education and tourism, leading to economic links/benefits.