

'MarioWay' curing wheelchair ills

Italian wheelchair hopes to bring users freedom

BERGAMO, Italy, July 29, (AFP): After nearly 20 years working with wheelchair-bound youngsters, Mario Vigentini wanted to revolutionise their quality of life, inventing a device that raises up users so they are face-to-face with those standing.

The Italian drew inspiration from the Segway — the two-wheeled, self-balancing, electric vehicle that allows visitors to nip around cities without walking — and came up with the "MarioWay", a hands-free, two-wheeled kneeling chair.

With its high seat, it allows users to do everything from ordering a coffee at a bar to plucking a book off a high shelf.

The Italian government was so impressed it proudly showed off the chair to the G7 transport ministers in June.

The aim was to create "a tool of social integration", Vigentini told AFP at his headquarters in Bergamo.

The 45-year-old found working with young people with mental and physical disabilities "an extraordinary adventure", but was disheartened by the prejudice they faced.

"At best, people approached them like a child," he said, as if because they were sitting closer to the ground they were somehow more



The founder of 'MarioWay', Mario Vigentini, presents his creation on July 19, 2017 at the Scientific and Technological Park 'Kilometro Rosso' in Bergamo. (AFP)

infantile.

Racking his brains for a way to change the situation, he came up with the idea of "trying to put an ergonomic seat — like those from the Nordic countries that were very fashionable in the 1990s — on a Segway".

"Nine out of ten people I talked to about this idea looked at me as if I came from another planet," he said.

But he was persuaded to take the idea to a start-up competition in Naples in 2012 — and made it to the final.

Disabled

Buoyed, he set up a team to study the ergonomics involved and brought in a dozen disabled people as collaborators.

Users of traditional wheelchairs are seated so that "the organs in the upper part of the trunk are compressed", while "almost the whole weight rests on the ischium" — the lower and back part of the hip bone.

This position "aggravates the pathologies of people with disabilities and results in other issues; digestive, respiratory, urinary or circulatory," he said, adding it also causes leg muscles to waste away.

But for users of Vigentini's invention,

"the upper part of the trunk is straightened", strengthening muscles which go unused in traditional wheelchairs.

The chair can go up to 20 kms (12 miles) an hour on a battery life of 30 kms.

It is equipped with "sensors that read the position of the body", so that "if I move my upper body slightly forward, the MarioWay advances slightly," said Flaviano Tarducci, the company's business development manager.

"It's the same to move backwards, while to go from side to side you move your pelvis slightly left or right," he said.

The design means that tasks that have been very challenging for traditional wheelchair users — such as opening doors or carrying a glass of water to a table — can be carried out with relative ease. Vigentini hopes to help destigmatize the wheelchair, which has remained unchanged for nigh on a century.

In the search for cool, his team has even swapped notes with a company that customises Harley Davidson motorbikes.

Its thermally-strengthened hubs and hand-stitched seats are not cheap. The MarioWay went on sale a few weeks ago at 19,300 euros (\$22,500), while a standard electric wheelchair costs between 1,500 euros and 30,000 euros.

Lifestyle



Women help deflate a balloon with a painting of the United States Constitution during the first day of the QuickChek New Jersey Festival of Ballooning on July 28, in Readington Township, NJ. (AP)

Balloon festival takes to skies near Trump golf course

A balloon with a painting of the US Constitution is among those that will fly in the skies near President Donald Trump's New Jersey golf course during a festival this weekend.

The 35th annual New Jersey Festival of Ballooning started Friday at the Solberg Airport in Readington. That's about seven miles from Trump's Bedminster golf course.

Organizers had to plan for the possibility of flight restrictions and other security concerns from a potential presidential visit. Trump has a home on the golf course.

Trump is not scheduled to be there this weekend. There is a flight restriction in place from Aug 3-20 that means planes can't land or takeoff from the airport.

The festival includes hundreds of balloons and musical performances by Pat Benatar, George Thorogood and Plain White T's.

For 35 years, organizers of New Jersey's biggest hot-air balloon festival have made preparations by lining up musical acts and getting ready to fill the skies over rolling hills and horse farms.

This year, they had to deal with the Secret Service. Organizers began to plan for the possibility of flight restrictions and other security concerns late last year.

"Anytime you do an outdoor festival you have to have the theory for 'hope for the best but prepare for the worst,'" said Howard Freeman, executive producer of the event.

"Preparing for a potential temporary flight restriction by the POTUS has enabled us to learn a lot more about preparation for that."

Freeman said organizers have met with the Secret Service three times and they've been told they'll be able to fly the balloons, even if the president was at his course about seven miles away.

There is a temporary flight restriction set up for the area around the golf course from Aug 3 to 20, but there is no sign that Trump is heading to Bedminster this weekend, allowing organizers to breathe a sigh of relief.

If Trump were in town, the balloon pilots and riders would go through security screening run by the Transportation Security Administration and Secret Service, Freeman said. (AP)

'Urban explorers' seek out abandoned places

Urbexers time-travel thru Berlin's lost places

BERLIN, July 29, (AFP): With its deserted bunkers, abandoned barracks and ghostly hospital ruins, Berlin is a magnet for urban explorers who seek out abandoned places and time-travel through the German capital's Cold War past.

"It's amazing, I've never seen so many people," said 'Urbex' veteran Ciaran Fahey during a visit to an overgrown and graffiti-covered former children's hospital in what was once communist East Berlin.

Two dozen thrill-seeking visitors — Germans, Russians, Latvians — were gingerly stepping over shattered glass, bricks and piles of rubble in the dilapidated, partially burnt and slightly haunting complex.

Abandoned in 1991, it is nicknamed the "zombie hospital" after one of the hundreds of murals on its cob-webbed corridors and dank former patient wards, now occasionally used by partying youths and homeless people.

Like other "lost places", it is potentially dangerous and officially off limits, meaning visitors trespass as they enter through a hole in the chain link fence while they keep a nervous eye out for authorities.

Berlin city official Eva Henkel said police take a dim view of such urban adventures, that visitors enter illegally and at their own risk.

"If you have any brains at all, you don't go in there," she said.

To Urbexers, this is as enticing as a holiday brochure, and the hospital is firmly on their Berlin sightseeing map.

Fahey, an Irish-born longtime Berlin resident, knows such lost places better than most, having lovingly photographed and described

them in his blog and photo book, both called "Abandoned Berlin".

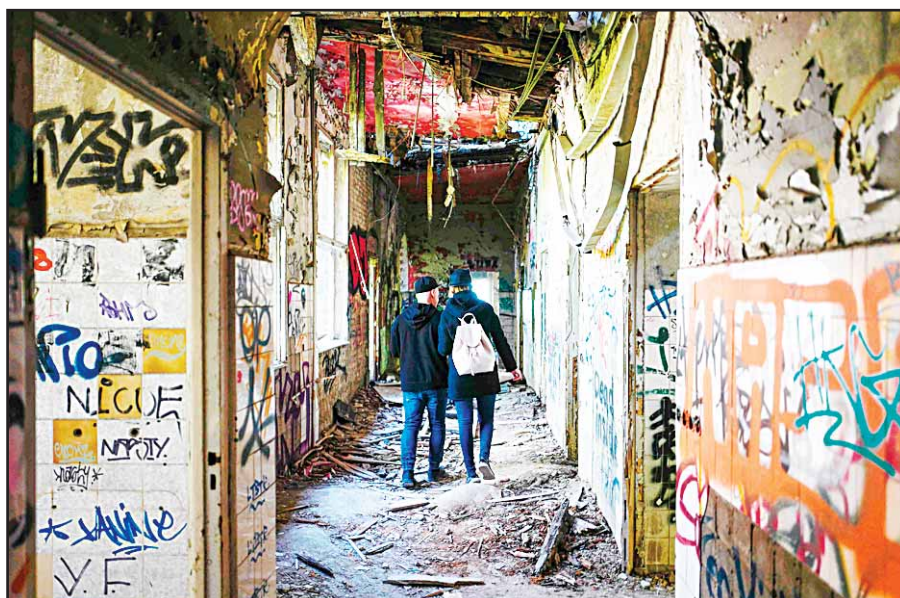
The trend took off after the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall opened up a vast hinterland, replete with former Nazi bunkers, Soviet army barracks, shuttered red-brick factories and even an old fun-fair with rides and replica dinosaurs.

As the East German economy collapsed and the country reunified, these places were left to

the ravages of weather and time.

Over a quarter-century on, as a property boom has remade the face of the city, the Urbex fashion has caught fire, with ever more explorers searching out ever fewer abandoned places.

The movement is global, with hotspots from Melbourne to Detroit, and sometimes dubbed "roof-and-tunnel hacking". A Google search for "urbex" nets more than seven million hits.



Youths explore an abandoned building in Berlin on May 12, 2017. (AFP)

"Interest has exploded in recent years, it is becoming more and more popular," said Fahey.

The movement's unspoken code is: take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footprints.

Inside the "zombie hospital", Max and Mila, two young Latvians, were walking under caved-in ceilings, dead lamp fittings dangling precariously from overhead wires, and admiring a vast gallery of urban street art.

To many the nerve-tingly trips have a flavour of post-apocalyptic tourism. Max said it was fascinating to witness "how nature has taken over".

Where there is a trend, private business is quick to follow, and several Berlin operators now offer tours for paying guests.

One takes the curious up a wooded hill in the former West Berlin, to a graffiti-covered Cold War-era listening post of the US National Security Agency (NSA).

For years, rave parties were held under its tattered geodesic domes, which loom like giant golf balls atop Teufelsberg (Devil's Hill), a mound made of World War II rubble.

Such tours offer "authorised and secure" access and allow everyone "to feel the fascination of these places", said Andreas Boettger, co-founder of operator Go2know.

As early Urbex pioneers, he said the company could understand that purists object to such for-profit tours.

But he said these also helped preserve old sites, "an ideology shared by many hobby photographers, history buffs and other interested people".

click

Alcoholics Anonymous: If you know someone who can't stop drinking and would like to help them please check us out and we promise to try to help at www.aarabia.org. There are no fees. This is a genuine public service.

Drinking problem?: Friends of Bill W. are available to help. Totally confidential. Email: rohsecretary@gmail.com

Narcotics Anonymous: NA can help with addiction problems. Totally confidential: 94087800 English/Arabic.

Cancer online support group: If you are Cancer patient or family member fighting with this deadly disease, come join our online support group. Best way of dealing with this disease is providing support and share our experience with each other. There are lot of things which even doctors can't tell so be member of this website and start sharing your experiences which may help others. October is recognized as National Breast Cancer Awareness Month (NBCAM). The primary purpose is to promote self examination and screening mammography as the most effective way to save lives by detecting breast cancer at early stage. For more information visit: <http://fightingwithcancer.webs.com/>

Latest

Indian Embassy notice: Indian nationals are issued Emergency Certificates (EC) to facilitate their one-way travel to India due to urgency or deportation, under the circumstances of loss of passport or non-retrieval of passport from their sponsors in Kuwait. Since it is illegal to hold two travel documents in India at the same time, the concerned passport has to be cancelled before an Emergency Certificate (EC) is issued to an Indian national. At times, Indian nationals who are either detained or due for deportation may not have their passports with them. They apply for travel documents (Emergency Certificate) either directly or through Kuwait Police. In such cases, ECs are issued to them after cancelling their passports. However, in certain cases, they recover their passports later and travel on those passports which already stand cancelled in data available with immigration authorities in India. These passports are immediately seized by Immigration authorities in India. This results in much harassment and inconvenience to these Indian travelers, whose passports are seized. They are also liable to pay penalties as per the law.

Indian Embassy advises all Indian nationals that if an EC is issued to anyone of them, that implies that his/her passport has been cancelled and that he/she should travel only on the EC issued to him/her.

Chess coaching, round robin: Registrations are open for chess coaching and the summer round robin Challenger Series. Send your name Civil ID no., mobile number, age, rating to saviosgomes@gmail.com with CCR in the e-mail subject. No entry fee.

Invitation to Grand Mosque: The Visits Department is pleased to invite you to visit the Grand Mosque, which is one of Kuwait's most treasured religious and cultural landmarks to discover the beauty of Islamic arts and architecture. Free guided tours are available all year round on official working days between (9-11 am) and (5-7 pm), within a special tour program designed to cater to the needs of different age groups. The program is as follows:

Reception; Auditorium show; (according to age group); Touring the Mosque; Q & A; Art workshops; (according to age group — between 5 and 18 years old); Snack break; Distribution of the Grand Mosque publications and souvenirs; End of tour.

According to these age groups:
Age group: 5 to 9 years old: Morning: 60 visitors max; Evening: 20; 10 to 15 years: Morning: 100 visitors max; Evening: 45; 16 and above: Morning: 140 visitors max, Evening: 105.

Tour language: Arabic- English- French; Arabic (English upon prior request); Arabic-English- French; Arabic (English upon prior request); Arabic- English- French: Arabic (English upon prior request)

Rules and Regulations:

- Please arrive in time for your visit.
- All visitors are kindly required to abide by the mosque's dress code. Male visitors should wear long pants. Shorts and sleeveless shirts are not allowed. Female visitors: should wear head cover and long loose clothing (available at the mosque).
- Foods and drinks are not allowed inside the prayer halls.
- For school visits, teachers are responsible for their students and are required to cooperate with the staff members of the Grand Mosque.
- Photography is allowed inside the Grand Mosque (please note that disrespectful poses

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