

ANOTHER BIG SPLASH IN NEUBURG!

Europe's largest winter swimming extravaganza took place at the end of January on the Danube, in **Neuburg**, our "Newcastle" in Bavaria, Germany ! This year just under 2000 swimmers from across the continent took part in the 55th annual swim.



The swimmers included Neuburg Mayor Bernhard Gmehling. For most of the swimmers it took 40-50 minutes to complete the 4-kilometre course. Around 100 brave souls entered the Danube without wetsuits! After a cup of hot chicken soup and the award ceremony, most of the swimmers stayed and enjoyed the traditional costume ball in the evening .

The Newsletter of "Newcastles of the World" • March/April/May 2026



Pictured at the awards evening on 5 March at Tukums City Culture House are (left to right) Liga Edmane-Kabaka, Kristine Liepiņa and Baiba Rasa, with the trophy.

CONFERENCE IS A WINNER !

At the beginning of each year, the Municipality of Tukums Region, Latvia looks back at the cultural events of the previous year and invites residents to nominate their favourite events in several categories.

And the occasion chosen as best event of 2025, by public voting, in the main category of Cultural Event of the Year was the Newcastles of the World conference organised and hosted by our dear friends in **Jaunpils!**

It was a wonderful event and the award is so well-deserved - many congratulations to the organising team. See page 4 for more.



MARIANNE TAKES GOLD !

Marianne Fatton from **Neuchâtel**, our "Newcastle" in Switzerland, won the Olympic gold medal in the event of ski mountaineering in Italy last month - see more about her on page 16. Many congratulations !

MARKING INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY



Around much of the world, March 8th is celebrated as "International Women's Day", recognising the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women.

So we are featuring the stories of remarkable women born in different "Newcastles", (left)

Lindiwe Mabuza from **Newcastle, South Africa**, and Dr Ng Yen Yen of **Kota Bharu, Malaysia**. Also Vera Brittain of **Newcastle-under-Lyme, United Kingdom** and Bodil Begtrup of **Nyborg, Denmark**, (right) - see page 2 for their achievements, and of others.



EXTRAORDINARY WOMEN FROM MANY DIFFERENT NEWCASTLES OF THE WORLD



Bodil Gertrud Begtrup (1903 - 1987), born in **Nyborg** was a Danish women's rights activist and diplomat. In 1929, she became a member of the board of Kvinderådet (the National Womens Council), in 1931 was elected vice-president, and in the period 1946-49 she was president. In 1939 she became Denmark's first female film censor.

After the war she became a member of the Danish delegation to the UN General Assembly. In 1946 she became chairman of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. Begtrup was vice chair of the committee that negotiated the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.

She was appointed Envoy to Iceland in 1949, and became Denmark's first female ambassador, when in 1955 she was appointed ambassador to Iceland.

Lindiwe Mabuza (1938 - 2021) was born in **Newcastle KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa**. She was a prominent politician, diplomat, poet, academic and journalist. She was an anti-Apartheid activist who went on to serve her country as a Member of the first democratically elected parliament of South Africa. She then proceeded to serve as a distinguished diplomat, including as High Commissioner to the UK.



Mabuza served on the Advisory Board of Elders of the Ifa Lethu Foundation repatriating lost South African artworks and also as the Chairperson of the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund UK. She was the winner of the 2017 South African Arts & Culture Trust Lifetime Achievement Award for Arts Advocacy, and her contributions in mobilising the use of arts for democracy confirm that cultural activism played a significant role in abolishing apartheid in South Africa.

Ng Yen Yen, who was born in 1946 in **Kota Bharu**, served in the Cabinet of Malaysia as Minister of Women, Family and Community Development from 2008 to 2009 and Minister of Tourism from 2009 to 2013.

Before that she was Deputy Minister of Finance for five years.

Her appointment as a full minister marked a milestone as the first Malaysian Chinese woman to hold a cabinet position.

She has many awards in recognition of her public service, notably Commander of the Order of Loyalty to the Crown of Malaysia (PSM).



Vera Brittain (1893 – 1970) from **Newcastle-under-Lyme** was an English Voluntary Aid Detachment nurse, writer, feminist, and pacifist through the League of Nations Union and the Peace Pledge Union.

Her extraordinary life was featured in an award-winning BBC programme, and in a film named after her most famous book "Testament of Youth", featuring Swedish actress Alicia Vikander as Vera, Game of Thrones' Kit Harington her fiancée, and Emily Watson and Dominic West as her parents.

The book, over 600 pages long, was Vera's vivid picture of the horror and futility of war based on her own experiences, and gives a voice to the wartime role of women. Vera's daughter Shirley Williams was a very well-known politician (and former Cabinet member in the UK government).

Lusine Zakaryan (1937-1992) born Svetlana Zakaryan, in **Akhaltshikhe**, Georgia was a renowned classical singer. In 1952, she moved with her family to Yerevan (Armenia), where she attended music school and then the Yerevan State Musical Conservatory, where her singing talent became clear. From 1970 to 1983, she was a soloist with the symphony orchestra of Armenian TV and Radio. She also sang in the choir of the Armenian Apostolic Church's Holy See at the Echmiadzin Cathedral, and it is for her magnificent rendition of centuries-old Armenian spiritual hymns that she is most remembered, but she was also known for singing the full international opera repertoire.



Miriam Roth (1910-2005) was born in **Nové Zamky** (now Slovakia) and studied at Brno University. She emigrated to Palestine - pre-state Israel - in 1931, studied at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and was one of the founders of Kibbutz Sha'ar HaGolan. During the Holocaust, her parents, two sisters, and two young nieces, who were still in Europe, were sent to Auschwitz, and none survived.

Miriam was a leading member of the Socialist-Zionist Hashomer Hatzair youth movement and taught preschool education and children's literature. She published 23 books for children during her lifetime, some of which became best sellers, and six books on education and children's literature. Roth received the Esther Rabinovich Award, the Ze'ev Prize for Lifetime

Achievement, and her work was recognised by UNICEF.



NEUCHÂTEL, SWITZERLAND



Davide Rivalta's animals are coming back to Neuchâtel! Eight years after a major open-air exhibition, the Bologna-based sculptor will once again leave his mark on the city by installing a collection of larger-than-life primates.

Around fifteen specimens will be displayed in various locations throughout the city from May 23 to September 20.

In parallel, a smaller exhibition at the Natural History Museum will offer visitors the opportunity to deepen their knowledge of great apes and gain a better understanding of the artist's work.

The people of Neuchâtel still remember the Italian artist's previous exhibition, which featured several of his works in the city,

including a rhinoceros, buffaloes, wolves, and a small lamb in the cloister of the Collegiate Church. (Photo of the monkeys taken in Brescia, credit: Ela Bialkowska OKNO studio).



CELEBRATING REPUBLIC DAY

Neuchâtel Republic Day (Jour de la République) is a regional public holiday in the Swiss canton of Neuchâtel, celebrated annually on March 1st.

It commemorates the 1848 bloodless revolution that overthrew Prussian monarchical rule and established the region as a republic within the Swiss Confederation.

It's marked each year with a grand opening (see photo) and then a walk in the footsteps of the revolutionaries, finishing at the castle.



FESTIN NEUCHÂTELOIS

March 8th brought the annual "Festin neuchâtelois", a celebration of the gastronomy of the area. Renowned chefs from the canton helped diners discover, or rediscover, ingredients from the Neuchâtel region: lake fish, Neuchâtel sausage IGP, Gruyère AOP, Neuchâtel cheeses, the delicious Suchard chocolate and artisan bread.



Established in 2023 following the merger of the municipalities of Corcelles-Cormondrèche, Neuchâtel, Peseux, and Valangin, the citizens' assemblies continue to grow. Starting this year, several new features will enhance their effectiveness, accessibility, and visibility among the population.

Since their launch, the citizens' assemblies have accepted over 160 proposals, with nearly 120 receiving a response or already implemented for the benefit of residents. A unique tool for local democracy in Switzerland in this form, the citizens' assemblies allow all residents of the City of Neuchâtel, regardless of age or civic status, to become directly involved in the life of their neighborhood and make their voices heard. Each of the seven assemblies in the municipality meets twice a year and provides a space for exchange, proposals, and democratic experimentation. (Photo of the city: Lucas Vuitel)

A NEW DEPARTURE FOR NEUCHÂTEL CITIZENS' ASSEMBLIES



JAUNPILS, LATVIA

CONFERENCE IS A WINNER!

..... continued from cover page

Jaunpils says: “A heartfelt thank you to our dear friends from the Jaunpils network who responded to the call and voted for us, as well as to everyone who supported us.

We are proud and delighted that, even half a year after the event, our Alliance conference continues to resonate and is recognised as an important cultural event in the region. “



JAUNPILS' SPECIAL LINK WITH THE FAMOUS BARRICADES

This year marks 35 years since the January 1991 Barricades, when supporters of Latvia's independence non-violently defended the country's freedom against military aggression and opponents of independence. It's an outstanding and internationally unique example of non-violent resistance and an integral part of Latvia's history. The country had declared restoration of independence from the Soviet Union but faced attack by Soviet specialist military units. Responding to the call of the Popular Front of Latvia, people erected barricades around strategically important sites in Riga and elsewhere in the country.

This January, the Latvian Ministry of Agriculture hosted a commemorative event dedicated to this historic anniversary. Special thanks were extended to Inga Spure, Head of Jaunpils Museum, for sharing the story of Jaunpils residents' participation in the Riga Barricades and emphasizing the vital contribution of the local community in defending Latvia's independence.

The event included a moment of remembrance at the commemorative boulder located near the Ministry of Agriculture, donated by Jaunpils farmers Guna and Gunvaldis Sprogis.



The 18-ton stone, unveiled in 2022, stands as a tribute to rural residents who, in the winter of 1991, brought heavy machinery to Riga and helped construct the barricades to protect strategically important state institutions.

Among the attendees at the commemoration in Riga were (left to right in photo) Inga Spure; Kristine Liepiņa of Jaunpils castle; Baiba Rasa, Head of Jaunpils and Viesatu parish administration; and Gunvaldis Sprogis, owner of the agricultural company “Jozi” and a participant in the 1991 Barricades.

STUDENTS GET INTO THE ACT TO MARK THE 90TH BIRTHDAY OF A FAMOUS COMPOSER

On February 13, students of Jaunpils Primary School gathered in the castle hall to take part in a lip sync performance dedicated this year to the 90th birthday of the outstanding composer Raimonds Pauls, one of the most popular and widely beloved Latvian musicians, known throughout the Baltic countries and Eastern Europe.

At Jaunpils Primary School, the lip sync performance is a cherished tradition – every February, students enthusiastically prepare performances, stepping into the roles of various



artists and creating true stage magic. As the school is currently undergoing renovation and modernisation, all major events are being held in the spacious and elegant castle hall, which added a special atmosphere to the celebration. The event featured beloved Raimonds Pauls melodies. The students impressed the audience with their creativity, courage, and stage energy.



SENIORS CELEBRATE THEIR ROLE

On February 24 the Jaunpils Seniors' Association marked its 15th anniversary at its annual general meeting. Participants were given a look back at the association's history and its most important milestones. All speakers emphasised the seniors' activity, optimism, and energy, expressing gratitude for their advice, inspiration, and positive example within the community.



NEWCASTLE, NEW SOUTH WALES, AUSTRALIA

Councillor Ross Kerridge (*in photo below on the left*) has resigned from his role as Lord Mayor of Newcastle to prioritise his health and family as he continues to experience the side-effects of recent cancer treatment. The resignation will trigger a by-election and election of a new Lord Mayor. Deputy Lord Mayor Charlotte McCabe will again take on the functions of the Lord Mayor until such time as a by-election is held.

CITIZENS OF THE YEAR

On Australia Day 26th January, the City of Newcastle, New South Wales announced its Citizen of the Year – Peter Sleep, for supporting those with cancer and their families. Senior Citizen of the Year title goes to both John Cross (supporting the homeless) and Wanda McInnes-Fogg (supporting refugee settlement).

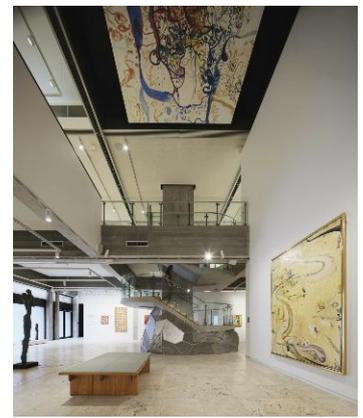


Young Citizen of the Year is 21-year-old Alyssa Wharton for her leadership in cricket, and Community Group of the Year is “Jenny’s Place” Women's Refuge.

Picture caption: From L-R Lord Mayor Ross Kerridge joins recipients Peter Sleep, Wanda McInnes-Fogg, Alyssa Wharton, Jenny's Place representative Dawn Walker and John Cross.



Margaret Beazley, Governor of NSW (fourth from left), with (L-R) Suzie Galwey, Tim Crakanthorp MP, Denis Wilson, CEO Jeremy Bath, Minister Yasmin Catley, Sharon Claydon MP and gallery director Laretta Morton.



The new Newcastle Art Gallery has opened after more than 16 years of fundraising and perseverance, ushering in a new era of cultural tourism in the city. New South Wales State Governor Margaret Beazley officially cut the ceremonial ribbon to acknowledge the Gallery’s transformation into the largest public gallery in NSW outside Sydney. Newcastle Art Gallery has stood as a cultural beacon since its establishment in 1957 and the official opening of its current building in 1977.

NYBORG, DENMARK

The Danish Royal Summer Ballet is coming to Nyborg!

June 9 will be eagerly anticipated in Nyborg when the city will be visited by dancers from the Royal Danish Ballet for a free performance under the open summer sky. Since 2006, the Royal Summer Ballet has thrilled audiences at castles, parks, harbours and museums. This year, Nyborg's beautiful square is the setting for this magical experience when the Royal Summer Ballet presents a program that includes both beloved classics and tasters from the coming season.



TOURISM IS THRIVING !

2025 has been reported as another year with more visitors to Nyborg.

Both hotels and campsites report an increasing number of overnight stays - and from abroad it is especially visitors from Germany who find their way to East Funen.



NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE, UNITED KINGDOM

Huge crowds gathered in at the end of February to celebrate Chinese New Year. They gathered along the parade route to the Chinese Arch for firecrackers and dance. Newcastle's Chinatown is one of the most important in the UK and the Chinese community is long-established in the city.



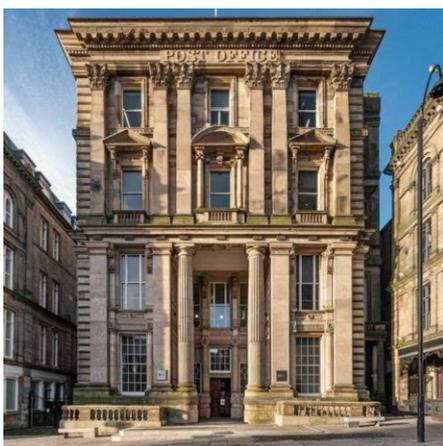
Thanks to Chronicle Live for the wonderful photos

Over 300 exceptional Newcastle women came together in early March to mark International Women's Day. It was an event that saw musician Yolanda Brown presented with Freedom of the City for her exceptional contribution to Newcastle and the North East, and her national leadership in music. The event showcased the rich cultural diversity and creativity that defines Newcastle, with attendees treated to performances and speeches from some of the area's most influential and celebrated women.



Newcastle Chief Executive Pat Smith, Council Leader Karen Gilgour, Yolanda Brown and Councilor Jacqui Robinson, Deputy Lord Mayor

NEWCASTLE TO HOST MAJOR CENTRE FOR WRITING AND PUBLISHING



The North East of England Combined Local Government Authority (NECA) is teaming up with Northumbria University to establish a major creative hub in Newcastle. The centre, a partnership with the charity New Writing North, has received £5m (EUR 5.8m) from the government's Cultural Development Fund and £1m (EUR 1.15m) from Newcastle City Council.

Now, Northumbria University in Newcastle has committed £2.5m (EUR 2.9m), with a further £2m (EUR 2.3m) to come from NECA, set for approval later this month, taking total funding to £10.5m (EUR 12,1m).

The intended location is the currently-empty grade-two listed Old Post Office in the city centre, subject to approval.

The 3000 square metres building underwent a major renovation in 2016 and was used as offices until it was put on the market last year.

Scheduled to open in 2029, the centre aims to bring together writers, publishers, students, academics, and creative businesses under one roof, offering career-focused opportunities in publishing outside London. Plans include housing Northumbria's English, Creative Writing, and Publishing courses, start-up and commercial publishers, an audiobook studio, creative spaces for TV and film, a café, independent bookshop, and event facilities.

The investment aims to strengthen the North East's creative sector, attract inward investment, and boost the local economy, positioning Newcastle as a national and international leader in writing and publishing.

Claire Malcolm, founder and chief executive of New Writing North said: "We are delighted that our longstanding partnership with Northumbria has resulted in this major commitment. Writing underpins not just publishing but film, TV, gaming, music, theatre, news and media.

The centre will enable great writing to happen here in Newcastle"

SHINSHIRO, JAPAN

On 18 January, Shinshiro Firefighting Festival was held at Sakurabuchi Park, drawing over 3,500 visitors.

During the ceremony, firefighters marched hand-in-hand with children, all wearing smiles. The various booths attracted long lines, offering unique experiences such as rides in fire trucks and aerial ladder trucks, allowing attendees to try activities they don't usually get to experience. The training demonstrations were a thrilling spectacle, with visitors able to see them up close and personal, adding to the excitement.



DROUGHT CONCERNS



The Pacific sides of Eastern Japan and Western Japan have been experiencing unusually dry weather, with rainfall levels reported to be the lowest in 30 years.

Shinshiro is also facing a continuing drought. The water supply for the Higashi-Mikawa region, which includes Shinshiro, comes from the Toyokawa Canal, and one of its key sources is the Ure Dam in Shinshiro. The dam's water storage level temporarily dropped to as low as 1.5%, resulting in a serious water shortage. Although the recent rainfall has slightly increased the storage level, as of early March it remains at only 2.3%.

Emergency water intake directly from the main flow of the Toyokawa River has been initiated, but the drought conditions persist, and water conservation efforts are still being strongly urged.

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME, UNITED KINGDOM



A local historian Philip Leese is the winner of the Lifetime Achievement award in Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council's fourth "Borough Heroes" Awards for showing passion, generosity and lifelong commitment in promoting his hometown's identity. After more than three decades, the former librarian continues to collect stories, document community memory and share local history through books, talks, walks and a long-standing weekly group. His encyclopaedic knowledge is relied upon and his published works have become essential reading for anyone interested in the area's past.

Other awards were presented at the end of February in the Business Community (AMB Insurance), Civic Pride (Philip Pritchard - individual; Newcastle District Scouts - organisation), and Young Hero (Sarah Edwards) categories.

Council Leader Simon Tagg said: "Our Borough Heroes Awards is a meaningful legacy from the 850th anniversary celebrations; it reflects and further builds pride in our loyal and ancient borough. It's a wonderful opportunity to honour those who quietly give their time and energy to others, helping to make Newcastle-under-Lyme such a special place to live, work and visit."



HERCEG NOVI, MONTENEGRO

CELEBRATING ITS MIMOSA FESTIVAL AGAIN



For more than half a century, winter in **Herceg Novi** has meant one thing — the annual Mimosa Festival, the centre of joy and entertainment across the region, because while everything sleeps, the yellow mimosa flower awakens.



The first weekend of the festival (February 13–15) featured the most beloved traditional events: the famous Feast of Mimosa, Fish and Wine along the riviera, vibrant masquerade balls, a flower exhibition, and sports happenings. Alongside the City Music Band and the Herceg Novi Majorettes, the Đenovići Brass Band, trombonieri, and costumed parades, Nina Badrić and Goran Karan, two icons of the regional pop music scene performed. The Saturday featured regional rock legends Riblja Čorba on the open-air stage, followed by the grand masquerade featuring the legendary YU Grupa, Ansambl Toć, and Exodusi.



NOVÉ ZÁMKY, SLOVAKIA

The town of Nové Zámky is part of an important international health collaboration between Slovakia and Switzerland, and has just hosted a major conference as part of the project.

Mayor Otokar Klein congratulated Denisa Felixova, Head of the Council Department of Social Affairs and Education (*pictured left*) who captivated the audience with a major presentation about the work in Nové Zámky - preventing non communicable diseases and improving health in Slovak self-governing regions and towns. This is a 16 million euro programme.

Recognising Ernest Zmeták in Sicily

Mayor Otokar Klein has just returned from Sicily as part of a Slovak delegation building links with the Italian island.



The delegation opened a new consulate in Palermo and then visited the town of Cefalu, where they were welcomed by the mayor of the town. There they paid their respects by laying wreaths to the Slovak painter Ernest Zmeták, who created in the town and drew inspiration for his work.

Zmeták (*pictured below*), who came from Nové Zámky, was the most significant collector of artworks in Slovakia in the second half of the 20th century, and an art gallery in Nové Zámky bears his name.



The art gallery has two permanent exhibitions. The major one, called "European Art of the 16th to 20th Century". is based on the donations of Zmeták.



NEWCASTLE, KWAZULU-NATAL, SOUTH AFRICA



Our good friend Johan Pieters of Newcastle, South Africa, recently had the privilege of sharing a little time with the President of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, as he arrived at Newcastle Airport (and again before his departure). They engaged in what Johan called "a fruitful discussion about Newcastle's potential, on unlocking business opportunities in the town and exploring avenues for growth".

Johan is involved in several business initiatives in Newcastle, and has attended a number of the Newcastles of the World conferences as well as being on the organising committee when his Newcastle was hosting.



Mayor Yolande Dube (above) has opened the latest series of career expos for young people in Newcastle.

NEW CASTLE, INDIANA, USA

Local people in New Castle, Indiana were raising funds to create their own "Special Olympics" at the time that the Winter Paralympics were taking place - such a good cause.



NEW CASTLE, PENNSYLVANIA, USA

MARKING USA'S 250TH BIRTHDAY



Lawrence County officially kicked off the national semiquincentennial celebration at the New Castle Library with the America 250PA team, community members and leaders. Commissioner Dan Vogler, Rep. Marla Brown and Sam Weiland of Senator Dave McCormick's office were present, with Ginny Jacob Colella (*second from right*), County Advisor for A250PA and Visit Lawrence County's Assistant Director.

Some events coming up in Lawrence County: Lecture series such as tracing your roots with the Daughters of the American Revolution, The Women's Suffrage movement, cemetery tours throughout the county, displays from Soldiers and Sailors, Revolutionary War Trivia nights and more; a Shenango China Presidential Plate exhibit at the Lawrence County Historical Society; a Veterans' Breakfast honouring veterans and active-duty service members and family on July 20; Revolutionary War movies shown at the Historic Warner Theatre; This is just a sample! Updates and events will be posted at

<https://www.visitlawrencecounty.com/events-calendar/>

NEUBURG AN DER DONAU



The latest carnival season is now over in Neuburg an der Donau, our “Newcastle” in Bavaria, Germany, a tradition that has taken place for more than seven decades. Over 80 dancers, young and old, from the Burgfunken carnival society have performed at the adult and children’s “courts” during the 2025/26 season. The princes and princesses who have presided over the adult events have been Lisa I (Fürholzer) and Fabian I (Schimmer), with Violetta I (Ferro) and Samuel I (Depoli) at the children’s court. By tradition, the society is given a symbolic key to the city at the beginning of the carnival season; our photo shows the key being returned to the retiring Mayor Dr. Bernhard Gmehling on Ash Wednesday, 18 February, at the conclusion of another successful season.

A NEW MAYOR FOR NEUBURG

Gerhard Schoder (Greens/SPD) is the new Lord Mayor (Oberbürgermeister)-designate of Neuburg an der Donau. We say congratulations and best wishes to him, and a very big thank you to the retiring Lord Mayor Bernhard Gmehling for his wonderful 24 years in that role, during which time he and his council have been so supportive of Newcastles of the World.



In the run-off election on 22 March Mr Schoder won almost 59% of the vote against Matthias Enghuber of the CSU. Gerhard Schoder grew up in Neuburg an der Donau. After graduating from Descartes-Gymnasium and the University of Ulm, his career took him to the United States. After returning to Germany, he worked in the private sector, and then became self-employed as a management consultant, advising companies, particularly in the automotive industry and its suppliers. He lives in Neuburg an der Donau, is married and the father of four children. He contested the mayoral election in Neuburg in 2020, losing to Bernhard Gmehling. and since 2020, has been a member of the Neuburg an der Donau city council and also a councillor in the Neuburg-Schrobenhausen district. On the city council, he belongs to the Alliance 90/The Greens group, which he chairs, and is the lead councillor for innovation and digital affairs as well as a member of the council of elders.

AKHALTSIKHE, REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA

NEW INVESTMENT FOR RABATI CASTLE



A competition for the project of rehabilitation of Akhaltsikhe Castle has been announced by the Municipal Development Fund of the Ministry of Infrastructure. The goal of the project is to protect the historic appearance and authenticity of the complex, restore damaged debris and provide a safe environment.

As a result of damage accumulated over time and improper work done in the past, the united citadel, towers, museum, church and public spaces in the castle complex need rehabilitation. According to the terms and conditions of the competition, the project must be carried out in full compliance with the Cultural Heritage Act and any intervention must be based on scientific conclusions.

In addition, the adaptation of space for people with special mobility and health needs will be a priority. The rehabilitation will further develop the cultural and tourist potential of Akhalsikhe and help strengthen the local economy.

NOVÉ HRADY, CZECH REPUBLIC

Masopust is a traditional folk festival celebrated between Christmas and Lent (January –March), characterised by lively merrymaking, masked parades, and hearty meals.

It marks the period from Epiphany to Ash Wednesday and symbolises bidding farewell to winter, abundance, and preparation for fasting.

In mid-February, Masopust carolling in Nové Hradý begins on Saturday morning, when all three groups of carollers, together with masks and musicians, march to the front of the town hall on the square.



Mayor Vladimír Hokr gives permission for the parade

Wonderful photos from Lucie Schattauerová - thank you!

There the captain and chief constable of each group ask the mayor for permission to carol throughout the town. After receiving permission from the mayor, the carollers perform the so-called “double round” for the mayor and on-looking guests, followed by a round for a happy journey.

The groups then split up and begin their procession through the town. In front of each house, the carollers dance around for the master or mistress, usually receiving refreshments, or perhaps a few coins for the collector’s bag. At the master’s request, the musicians play a chosen tune, and the dance leaders invite the mistress and other ladies and girls present to join in the dance. The Masopust festivities conclude on Sunday afternoon with the Masopust Funeral and a symbolic burial.

KOTA BHARU, MALAYSIA

“WALK WITH ME” RETURNS

After a gap of several years, the “Walk With Me Kelantan” event has taken place in Kota Bharu. It’s an iconic event that combines elements of sports, culture, and is based on the relationship between the royal palace and the people, as the Sultan and Sultanah lead the event (*see left and right below*).

The event was co-founded in 2011 by the cousin of the Sultan of Kelantan himself, the Late YM Dato' Tengku Ibrahim Farihaddin B. Dato' Tengku Feissal (Dato' Ky). It is in the Malaysia Book of Records when over 30,000 people took part in 2011, which made it the largest royal walkathon in the country.

The 2026’s event also attracted thousands of participants in mid-February and was held in conjunction with the “Year of Visiting Malaysia”, the country’s national tourism promotional campaign. The walkers cover a distance of 3km across the city centre of Kota Bharu, linking many historical landmarks of Kelantan state.



This Royal Walkathon Carnival was held over three days and featured many side activities including a Food Festival, exhibitions, a showcase of three elephants, and religious segments. There was also a spectacular show of 350 drones in ten formations at the Sultan Mohammed IV Stadium, showcasing many traditional elements of local culture, such as wau (traditionally-crafted, intricately designed Malaysian moon-kites), wayang kulit (shadow puppetry) and gasing, or top-spinning.

AN INVITATION FROM NEW CASTLE, DELAWARE, USA

Since 1976 the City of New Castle, with support from the State of Delaware, has sponsored the celebration of its independence from England and Pennsylvania through the annual Separation Day event, held on the second weekend in June. Not only does 2026 mark the 250th anniversary of the Separation, but also the 375th anniversary of the settlement of the City. To celebrate and honour the anniversary - and of “America 250” - the City will be celebrating on June 12th and June 13th, 2026 in New Castle, Delaware.

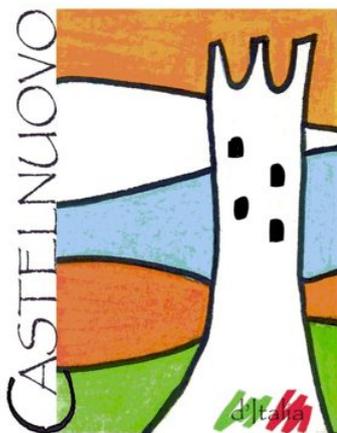
Starting on Friday evening in the downtown historic area, now hub to the national monument, residents and visitors will enjoy a street festival, food trucks and live entertainment. The celebration continues on Saturday with a late morning parade down Delaware Street in front of the New Castle Courthouse Museum, in the centre of the City, followed by an all-day festival with vendors, children’s rides and games, live entertainment, and food vendors.

The day ends with a memorable fireworks display at dusk in Battery Park. The 40+ years of partnering between the State and the City of New Castle has helped create continued awareness of the illustrious State history, through the eyes of this magnificent City.

Each year, as the event grows, the number of non-profits, crafters, parade participants, and attendees increases. This event is not only a local but a statewide celebration of the beginning of the nation as known today.

New Castle would love to host visitors from other Newcastles of the World, says Diane Delgado. To plan your trip and learn more about the event, please visit:

<https://www.separationdayde.com/> and
<https://newcastlecity.delaware.gov/>



Logo of the Castelnuovo d'Italia

ITALY'S CASTELNUOVO: A PACT OF BROTHERHOOD (The “Newcastles” of Italy)

From a country festival an idea was born capable of joining municipalities far between them, but bound by a name, a history and a strong sense of community. Alberto Soli is coordinator of the Castelnuovo e Castelnovo d'Italia network, and in an interview with Alberto we discover how the Brotherhood Pact was born, which territories it involves and why it represents a concrete experience of collaboration between small municipalities rich in traditions.

Alberto starts: “The idea was born in December 2003, in Castelnuovo Rangone, my hometown, about ten kilometers from Modena. On that occasion, the Superzampone Festival was being celebrated—as it still is today. Partly jokingly, partly seriously, we began talking about the other Castelnuovos: where they are, what they are like, what festivals they celebrate. From there, the idea was born to invite the mayors of the other Castelnuovo municipalities to our festival to present our region. Then, as often happens, one thing led to another: meeting after meeting, discussion after discussion, we arrived at the formation of the Castelnuovo d'Italia Brotherhood Pact”



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To continue reading the interview with Alberto, it’s on <https://www.casadeicittadini.it/notizie-progetti/i-castelnuovo-ditalia-un-patto-di-fratellanza?>



YOUTH

Introducing the new Youth Council in Newcastle upon Tyne

11,000 votes were cast by the city's young people in the March election!
Left - you can see the newly-elected members at Newcastle Civic Centre.



Twelve young people from **Nyborg** Municipality (Denmark) have taken part in the project "Young Influence". Here a total of 55 young people between 15 and 24 years old from five municipalities met at youth citizen gatherings, where they prepared 14 concrete recommendations for their municipal politicians. The municipalities have committed themselves to comply with the recommendations in 2026, so that young people's voices gain more weight in local politics. Nyborg says: "The local democracy of the future must be developed with the young people - not on their behalf".

Nyborg's young people have especially given priority to recommendations which make it easier for young people to keep up with what is happening in local democracy in everyday life - for example, a digital bulletin board targeted at young people.



They have also focused on strengthening young people's democratic self-confidence, among other things through earlier and more targeted democratic debate in school. Along the way, the young people have built up a strong community across age, background and interests.

The **Newcastle-under-Lyme** Borough Heroes Awards Young Hero for this year is Sarah Edwards, described as a "shining example of courage and compassion". Alongside daily caring responsibilities for her mum and grandmother, she still finds time to support her community. She raises money for charities, helps with foodbank and wellbeing projects, and plays a key role in improving support for people with disabilities.



EUROPEAN YOUTH PARLIAMENT UNITED KINGDOM



Rosie Bell, who was a youth delegate to the 2025 Newcastle's of the World conference in Latvia, writes: "In February, the school halls of Jesmond Park Academy in Newcastle upon Tyne played host to

the European Youth Parliament (EYP) North East Regional Forum 2026, a landmark event for youth diplomacy in our region. As one of Europe's largest platforms for civic education, EYP empowers young people to tackle complex geopolitical issues through peer-led parliamentary simulation. This year's forum on 25 February, saw ambitious delegates from seven local schools come together to debate resolutions on the most pressing challenges facing our continent today.

"We welcomed David Faulkner of Newcastle's of the World as our guest speaker, whose address bridged the gap between local governance and international cooperation, a core value of our "Newcastles" alliance.

Serving as both a youth delegate in Newcastle's of the World and the Head Organiser for this event for this newsletter's coverage, I had the privilege of witnessing firsthand the intense collaboration during the passionate rhetoric of the General Assembly. From environmental policy to digital rights, the intellectual rigor displayed by my peers proved that the youth of the North East are not just future leaders, but active contributors to the global dialogue right now. It was a proud moment for our city to see such a high level of engagement, reinforcing the ties that bind our global network of Newcastle's through shared values of democracy and education"



On 28 January, a travel lecture with a presentation about the Newcastle's of the World conference in Latvia was held from the perspective of young participants.

This lecture took place in the Cultural and Community House for pupils of years 7-9 from the **Nové Hradý** Primary School. Nové Hradý is a member of the NCW alliance, and in August, a **Czech** delegation attended the week-long conference in Jaunpils, Latvia, bringing back many valuable experiences, insights and memories.

The presentations were delivered by students from the Trhové Sviny Grammar School who took part in the event. The lecture was then repeated next day for the general public. There is also a plan for another travel lecture about the Czech expedition to Shinshiro in Japan.

THE RACE FOR PEACE - 16 June

- There's still lots of time for your "Newcastle" to take part, however large or small the event you can organise - your town, your school, your club.

On 16 June 2026 the Race for Peace is organising and supporting a number of events around the world to promote peace in our world, our communities and our homes. The date marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Soweto Uprising when the schoolchildren of Soweto stood against the Apartheid regime; hundreds of young people lost their lives when the security forces opened fire on their peaceful protest.

Race for Peace is an idea that was initiated 30 years ago by Tim Cattle-Jones of Newcastle upon Tyne, who has spent the past three decades linking the North East of England and South Africa, through sport and culture.

Tim is part of our Newcastles of the World organisation, and, together with Monjer Rachid who has been involved with us for over 15 years, is coordinating the 2026 Race - although it can also be a walk or jog!

Tim and Monjer report: "We are progressing well with the Race for Peace and the schools partnership. We already have commitment from Japan, Latvia, Rwanda, Slovakia, South Africa, Switzerland and Uganda, as well as the United Kingdom. The schools partnership is really coming together as well and we are anticipating that we will create a network of at least 20 schools, half of which will be from Africa. Each school from the UK, Europe, Japan will be connected to an African school, and they can then develop their partnership directly."

Rooted in the African philosophy of Ubuntu "I am because we are" the Network creates meaningful peer-to-peer connections that help young people better understand themselves, each other and the world around them.



Any funds raised from the events will go towards the "Ubuntu Network" which is an international education and youth exchange platform, designed to connect schools and communities across the world through learning, creativity and shared human experience.

In Newcastle upon Tyne it's a Peace Walk that will take place between 6pm and 8pm on the evening of 16 June.

Participants will gather at Newcastle Civic Centre and walk the short distance to Exhibition Park.

The Walk will be led by young people waving flags of the world and dressed in different national costumes. After arrival, there will be a further procession around the park. At the Peace Walk start there will be a stall with "Ubuntu"/Walk T-shirts for sale, introduction and welcome, safety and African drummers' performance; also a stall in the park, where there will music and dance performances from around the world.

In 1994, as South Africa took its first steps into democracy, President Nelson Mandela endorsed the first Race for Peace.

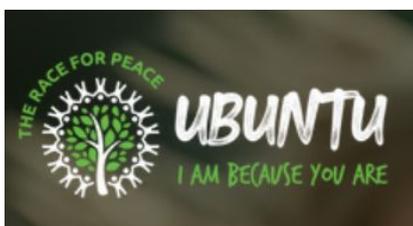
It was a symbolic event using sport as a tool for healing, unity, and hope.

The race raised funds for township sports programmes and promoted reconciliation during a pivotal time in the nation's history.



Today, Race for Peace is evolving into something bigger - a worldwide series of community-led events united by a simple but powerful idea: peace through participation. These events are not competitive races for trophies.

They are peace walks, fun runs, and community gatherings that honour the spirit of young people past and present and reaffirm our shared commitment to justice, equality, and human dignity. Each city that takes part will bring its own culture, context, and energy to the race, but we are united by a common cause: to uplift youth, promote social cohesion, and stand together in peace.



**For more information on how to get involved,
email: monjer.rachid@youthcharter.org
or check out www.raceforpeace.world**



NEWS FROM NEWCASTLES OF THE WORLD

from Sharon Race, our Coordinator

It has been a great start to 2026 for Newcastle of the World, and for me personally in my new role as Co-ordinator.

Starting my adventure on the first of December, the first call of business was Christmas-themed! Approaching Newcastle to record a short Christmas and New Year video greeting from their Newcastle to then edit into a social media friendly reel gave us an eclectic mix of locations.

From the snow of Nove Hradý (Czech Republic) and Neuchâtel (Switzerland) to the sunny Shinshiro (Japan); The Grinch in New Castle, Indiana, USA; cold, grey weather from the UK and the Christmas German Markets of Neuburg an der Donau, Bavaria. We even had, thanks to our friends in Newcastle, Australia, a Koala Bear named Rupert! Thanks to all who participated and those who shared on social media platforms. Thanks to that we had nearly ten thousand views!

The New Year has brought with it the appointment of voluntary Education Ambassadors in many of the Newcastle with more to sign up. The Education Ambassadors will work to connect on projects in English with schools across the Newcastle, exploring topics of interest and sharing best practice. Initial connections are expected to be online, which could possibly lead to exchange visits in the future. If you work in, or know of someone who does, education or youth affairs and would like to get involved, please email me at newcastles@sharonrace.co.uk with the subject line 'Education Ambassador'.

We are also creating a Castle & Fortress Managers and Administrators Network that will bring together professionals to create a supportive forum to connect with peers, and explore opportunities to collaborate on projects. Again, if you work in, or know of someone who does, cultural and heritage buildings and would like to get involved, drop me an email at newcastles@sharonrace.co.uk with the subject line 'Castle & Fortress Managers and Administrators Network'.

Looking forward to more exciting news to update you with!

Sharon

There are so many great things going on in 2026 in our "Newcastles" around the world.

This new calendar of events showcases the best of them in our main partner Newcastle.

If you're thinking of visiting, why not go when one of them is taking place? The link to the calendar on our website is here - <https://tinyurl.com/hmzfu5h5>



ABOUT NEWCASTLES OF THE WORLD : There are more than 100 different "Newcastles" or "New Castles" around the globe, in many different countries and different languages.

It was the mayor of one of them, in Shinshiro, Japan, who took the initiative to bring the Newcastle together via the Newcastle of the World summit in 1998 . Subsequent gatherings were held in Neuchâtel, Switzerland in 2000, USA (New Castles of Indiana and Pennsylvania) 2002, South Africa 2004 and 2010, UK 2006 (Newcastle-under-Lyme) and 2012 (Newcastle upon Tyne), Neuburg an der Donau (Germany) in 2008, Nové Hradý (Czech Republic) in 2014 and 2023, Newcastle, Ontario, Canada in 2016, Shinshiro again in 2018 and then Jaunpils (Latvia) in 2025. The next conference will return to Neuburg in 2027.

The aim of Newcastle of the World is to foster links of friendship, culture, education, business and tourism between us all.

SPORT

Marianne Fatton, a native of **Neuchâtel**, is a Swiss ski mountaineer and not only represented her country at the 2026 Winter Olympics in North Italy but won gold in the sprint race! Marianne had won at last year's world championships but this was the first-ever Olympic event in ski mountaineering. And two days later, she won a silver medal in the mixed relay, along with Jon Kistler! Many congratulations, Marianne!



PETER AND MARIANNE ARE WINNERS!

Congratulations to young athletics star Peter Csikós from the **Nové Zámky** Athletics Club in Slovakia who has performed excellently in this year's indoor athletics season, winning three individual titles of Slovak indoor champion.



SHINSHIRO MARATHON IS ANOTHER SUCCESS

The Shinshiro (Japan) Marathon was held on January 25th, with 882 runners taking part. The youngest participant was just 3 years old, while the oldest was 84!



In the 3km health jog, families participated together at their own pace, and everyone crossed the finish line. Similarly, all participants in the 5km and 10km races completed the course, demonstrating the results of their hard training.

FORTY YEARS OF SURFEST !

Newcastle (Australia) Surfest is the largest surfing festival in the southern hemisphere, with more than 800 competitors from across the globe competing across nine events throughout February and March. It culminated with the final event of the World Surf League, Challenger Series from March 9 -15. City of Newcastle has supported Surfest since its beginning in 1985.



Young handball stars from Nove Zamky go to the Worlds

Students of the Joint School of Secondary Education (SPŠE SA) Jedlika and the Business Academy, Nove Zamky achieved extraordinary sporting success at the Slovak Championship of High School Handball in February, qualifying for the World Championship of High School Handball in April in Skopje, North Macedonia.



At the time of writing, the Newcastle Jets football team, from **Newcastle**, New South Wales are top of **Australia's** A-League, only a few months after they won the Cup. Let's hope they can stay there and carry off the League title too.

SKATING ON SWISS ICE

The 17th edition of the Neuchâtel Trophy for Synchronised Skating took place on March 6 and 7. It's one of the premier skating events in Switzerland and again attracted a large and enthusiastic crowd. Skaters from across Switzerland took part, as well as from Belgium, Germany and Czech republic.

The aim is to skate together in graceful, athletic and synchronised mode! The United Blades team, Neuch-Chatella, put on a great performance, finishing in the first place in their category. Congratulations to them and their coaches!

