

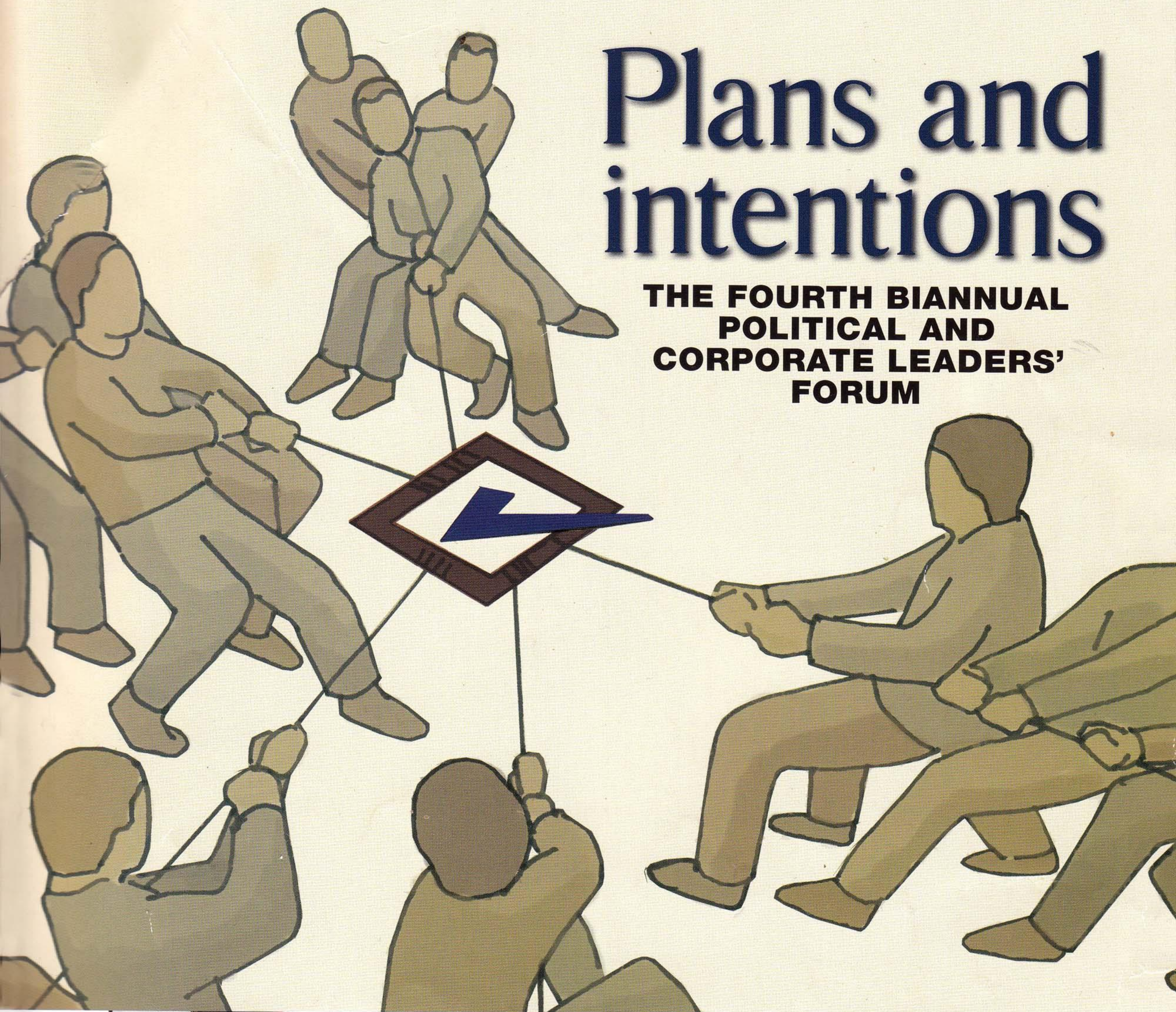
AMCHAM HUNGARY

A PUBLICATION OF THE AMERICAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE IN HUNGARY

MARCH 2010 – VOLUME XXI/1

Plans and intentions

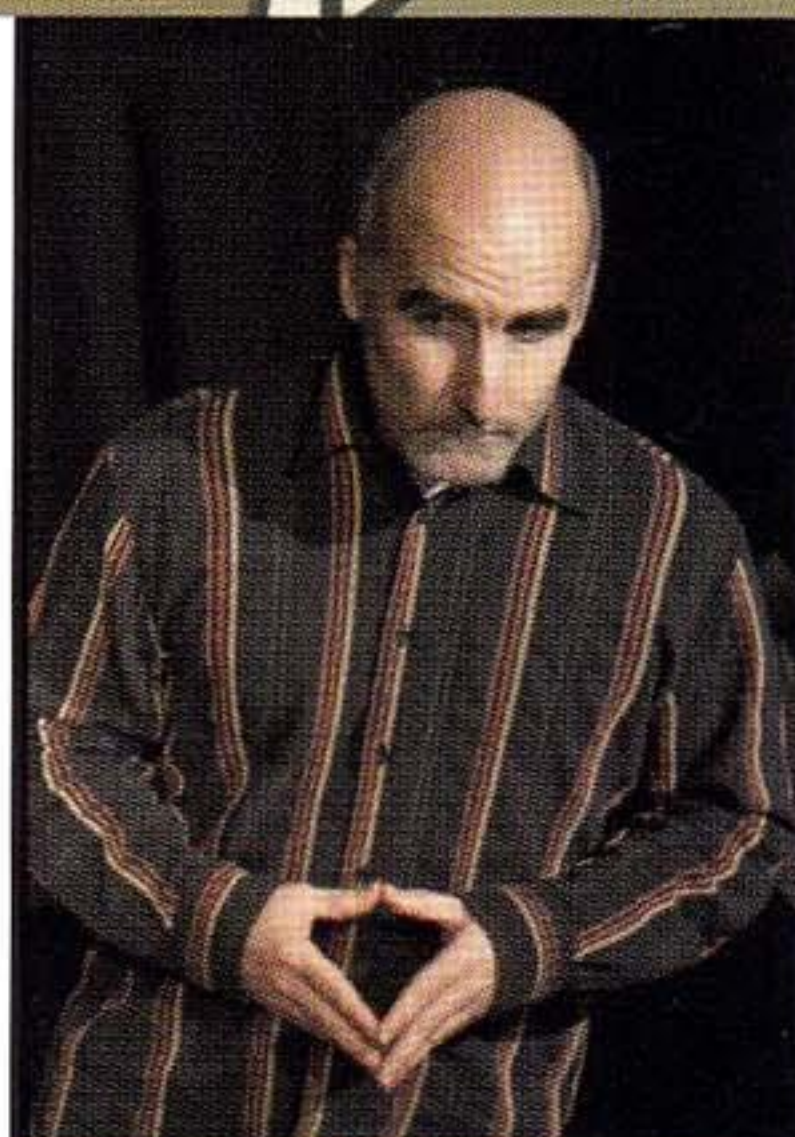
THE FOURTH BIENNIAL
POLITICAL AND
CORPORATE LEADERS'
FORUM



14171864
14173778
290 Ft €5



**Not a
handout**
MICROLOANS
FOR SAVING
ENERGY



**Outspoken
rhetoric**
NEW ENGLISH
EVENTS
ENLIVEN
AUDIENCES



**A serious
warning
sign**
J&J SHIFTS
FOCUS
AWAY FROM
HUNGARY

Outspoken rhetoric

NEW
ENGLISH
EVENTS
ENLIVEN
AUDIENCES

If you had five minutes to speak to an engaged audience on any topic, what would it be? Or, if you had to give a five-minute impromptu speech on peas or another zany audience suggestion, could you pull it off? For the intrepid and inventive, two new events – Ignite Budapest and Gift of the Gab – allow people to move beyond the hypothetical and live out these questions in highly entertaining formats.

BY MARISA BEAHM

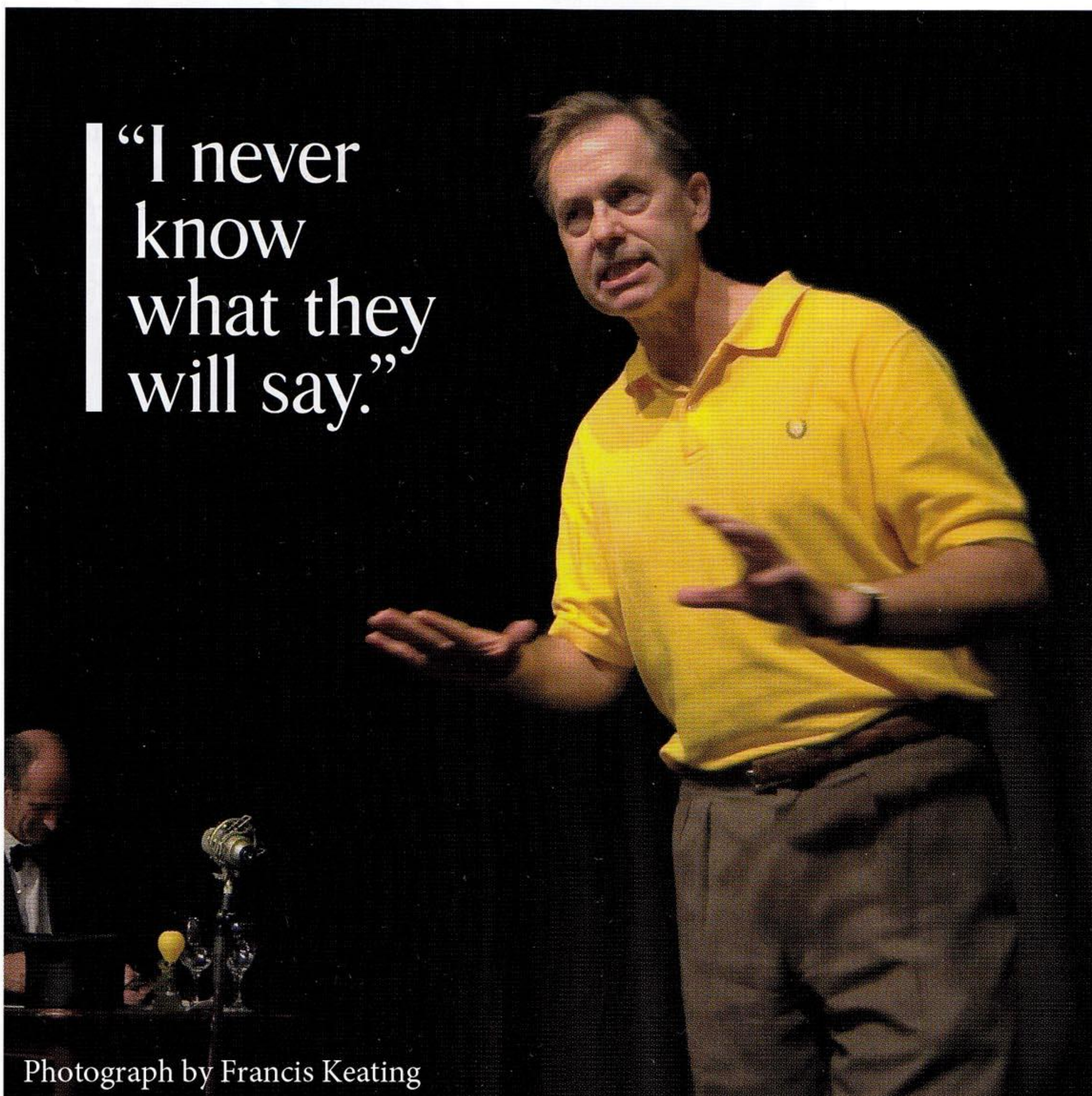
TURNING PROSAIC LECTURES on their heads, these two novel events invite speakers to present their manifold interests in comic or intellectually stimulating ways, allaying the local hunger for more English-language activities. “In both Ignite and Gift of the Gab, the speaker is free to choose their topic, which means people can share their passions with others and spend five minutes addressing a captive audience,” says Gretchen Meddaugh, an American expat who co-hosts Gift of the Gab. “These are chances to get creative, to face a fear, and enjoy the rush of living through it.”

IDEAS IGNITED

ON AN EVENING LAST MAY, the cozy book-lined interior of Treehugger Dan’s Bookstore Café and Lounge was brimming with more than 100 spectators. Every folding chair was occupied, so people perched on staircases and gathered in the back of the venue, so as not to miss the debut of Ignite Budapest.

Throughout the evening, an eclectic collection of 14 crowd-pleasing speakers took the stage, performing humorous speeches like “The Slacker Diaries: The Philosophy of Shirking Work”, or more activism-inspired topics like “Power of Raw Food” or “Green CSR”. But instead of anything-goes presentations, there are strict rules Ignite speakers must follow. They can only talk for five minutes and must be accompanied by 20 slides that automatically advance every 15 seconds. “It’s learning in an enjoyable way, not in a lecture format,” says Steven Nelson, the Budapest Ignite organizer and host. This “info-tainment” format, as Nelson dubs it, ensures that no speaker drones on – a folly at many public-speaking events. Also, if audience members aren’t interested in a particular presentation, they can rest assured knowing a new one will be along in five minutes.

Nelson decided to start Ignite in Budapest after reading about it on a blog. Following the impressive launch turnout, he was encouraged to host another event in November. “It’s really nice to have something intellectual; people are hungry for that,” Nelson says. For speakers, the event is attractive since it allows them to talk about their pet projects and to practice public speaking, which is “pretty damn important if you have any ambitions,” says American expat and Toastmaster, Steven Carlson, who gave a presentation on Gypsy social networking at the first Ignite.



Photograph by Francis Keating

PECHAKUCHA

THE CONCEPT OF IGNITE is a newer iteration of PechaKucha, a Japanese term for the sound of chitchat, and also the name for an event that began in Tokyo in 2003. The first event of its kind, it began as a creative way for young designers to meet, network, and showcase their work by giving presentations that included 20 different images on screen for 20 seconds. In the same vein, Ignite began in Seattle in 2006, slightly altering the PechaKucha format to 20 slides for 15 seconds, which ensures presentations move at a swift pace. The movement quickly proliferated and the event is now held in more than 60 cities across the world, according to the official Ignite website.

Unlike the Japanese equivalent, no particular themes have dominated the Budapest Ignite events, and Nelson sets few boundaries. “We try to avoid politics, sex, and religion, but everything else is fair game,” he says. The most engaging speeches are the ones with well-planned slides, Nelson adds. “It works best if the slides support the talk and vice versa. People tend to pay attention more, and it works best if the slides are simple and direct.”

Although Nelson has the privilege of seeing the slides before the speakers’ presentations, the actual focuses of the talks remain a mystery until they are in progress. “I never know what they will say,” Nelson says. “I see the slides, but I don’t know how the presentations will turn out.” Even participants in Presentation Karaoke – an amusing challenge in which contestants invent an off-the-cuff speech to random slides – won’t know what will happen until they’re doing it.

Anyone is welcome to speak at the event, and the bold can sign up on Ignite’s website, www.ignitebudapest.net. “We are always looking for people who will talk about interesting subjects. This will be a challenge for us as long as we have these events,” Nelson adds. The next Ignite event will be on March 3, as part of Global Ignite Week, where 60 cities will host at least 600 talks across the world between March 1-5.

GIFT OF THE GAB

AFTER ENJOYING AND PARTICIPATING IN IGNITE, Budapest-based expats Mary Murphy and Gretchen Meddaugh decided that while they loved the concept and format of it, they wanted an event that had more regard for the audience. “It is a pervasive problem in the realm of ‘real-life’ presentations that speakers talk without much concern for what the audience wants – for example, to be acknowledged,” Meddaugh says. “Mary and I are both Toastmasters, so we spend a lot of time analyzing the effectiveness of speakers. Also, she and I were both poetry-slam enthusiasts before moving to Hungary, and it was Mary who envisioned a crossover between public speaking or presenting and the slam ethos.”

Thus, they modeled their “speech slams” in the lively poetry-slam format, which gives randomly selected audience judges the power to score original performances. “By selecting judges from the audience and encouraging audience response, speakers at Gift of the Gab have to deliver what the crowd wants,” Meddaugh says. Since September, there have been five open rounds of the competition. Each event features five contestants who perform twice. In the first half, they give a prepared speech that is four to five minutes long – speeches out of the time constraints are penalized in score. “The competition is fun, and it really adds a level of

excitement,” says Nelson, who gave a speech on the jumping power of kangaroos during the October competition.

In the second half, the audience writes down any speech topics that they would like a contestant to speak about, and the competitors draw a suggestion out of a hat. Illuminating who is blessed by the blarney, competitors must instantly create three-minute extemporaneous speeches on their chosen topic. For some speakers, this can make or break the event, like for Carlson who was pinned with the “worst topic ever” on the rebirth of nature, he recalls. However, one speaker gave a riveting talk on peas, “proving a gifted speaker can entertain with even the most mundane topic,” Meddaugh says.

The best part of Gift of the Gab is the unpredictability, Meddaugh adds. “I love the energy and the fact that everyone in the room is taking part, not just the speakers and hosts. I’m also really happy to be part of something unique, to be a pioneer in the realm of interactive, do-it-yourself entertainment.” Champions from all open rounds will sound off against each other at a final competition on March 24 at the Cotton Club, check out the Gift of the Gab website: <http://sites.google.com/site/bpgiftofthegab/home>. ★



“People can share their passions with others.”

Photograph by Francis Keating