



Iditarod Trail Committee
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Veteran Iditarod musher Aliy Zirkle wins coveted Leonhard Seppala Humanitarian Award

Anchorage, Alaska – Veteran Iditarod musher Aliy Zirkle of Two Rivers, Alaska, has been awarded the Iditarod XLVIII Leonhard Seppala Humanitarian Award, designated to a musher whose team demonstrates outstanding care of their race team while remaining competitive.

The winner is determined by a combination of voting by trail veterinarians and independent scoring of the teams by three veterinarians in Nome. Each volunteer trail veterinarian is asked to submit their first, second and third choices, with specific point values assigned for each choice based on the musher's care at checkpoints. For scoring, each sled dog within teams placing in the top 20 is then individually evaluated in Nome by the three independent veterinarians, who assess dogs for hydration, attitude, bodyweight and gait. The winning musher is chosen based on the combination of voting points from the trail veterinarians and the team scores established by the three veterinarians in Nome.

Zirkle is no stranger to winning this honor. In fact, with her 2020 award, she becomes the first, six-time winner of the award. Before 2020, Zirkle was tied with veteran musher Martin Buser with five Leonhard Seppala Humanitarian awards each. Legendary musher Leonhard Seppala's care for his dogs is considered the gold standard and was the key to his team's success in the historic 1925 serum run to Nome.

"This award is the most coveted award for mushers and has great importance to the race and to the Iditarod Trail Committee in its mission to promote excellence in dog care. Aliy continues to impress us year after year with the outstanding care she provides her team," said Dr. Nelson.

The scores were extremely close for the award this year with third place race finisher Jessie Royer coming in second in the voting and Iditarod XLVIII champion Thomas Waerner placing third for the humanitarian award.

Iditarod CEO Rob Urbach commended each of the participants of Iditarod XLVIII for the care they provide their teams. "Exemplary dog care is of paramount importance and Aliy, Jessie and Thomas fully embody this value," Urbach said.

The Iditarod is continuously improving its dog care standards. The organization performs pre-race chip insertions, veterinary exams, echocardiograms and a complete blood count chemistry panel for each dog athlete – about 4,800 individual veterinarianary procedures in total. This year, 55 volunteer veterinarians were flown from all over to man every checkpoint along the Iditarod trail.

The Iditarod Trail Committee is a 501(c)(3), and is dedicated to preserving the rich tradition of the sled dog and the Iditarod trail. The organization relies on funds raised largely through sponsorship and its annual raffle to fund the race. For more information on how to give to the Iditarod, including purchasing a raffle ticket, visit Iditarod.com or call 1.800.545.6874.

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