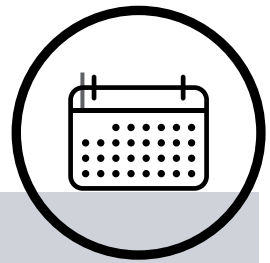




# MUSH ON!

YOU CAN LEARN A LOT FROM A TEAM OF DOGS



APRIL 2026 VOL. 6, NO. 8

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

April 5: [Last Day Sign Up for Musher Letter Writing](#)

July 21-24: Iditarod EDU Summer Conference

## EDU PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

### EDU Summer Conference; New England, Here We Come!!!

If you were not able to attend our Winter Conference in Anchorage this year, but would still like to have an incredible PD opportunity a little closer to home, then this is your opportunity!

The Iditarod EDU department will be coming to the lower 48 again this summer to help spread the spirit of the race to a new area of the country.

Location: Poland Spring, Maine  
(~30 minutes north of Portland)

Dates: July 21-24, 2026  
Cost: \$130

Poland Spring is located about 30 minutes north of Portland, but has an incredible connection to Alaskan dog mushing history. The famed Serum Run musher, Leonhard Seppala, had one of the most famous sled dogs of all time retire in Poland Spring. That dog was Togo. The area has a walking trail dedicated to the famed sled dog and other rich, historical markers, including a statue of Togo himself!

To find out more about the full history, read the article listed here: [polandsprings.org](http://polandsprings.org)

In addition to our great lineup of speakers and presenters, we will also do a "field trip day" to a kennel, and enjoy plenty of time with dogs!!!

Presenters are still being lined up, but so far include:

Erin Montgomery - 2015 Teacher on the Trail

Annie McGuire - 2017 Teacher on the Trail

Lara Renner - 2018 Junior Iditarod musher

Jim Deprez - 2021/2022 Teacher on the Trail

Jonathan Hayes - 2025 Centennial Seppala Expedition Musher, author, teacher

A representative from the Can-Am Crown Dog Sled Race (a qualifier for Iditarod)

Be on the lookout because registration will open SOON!



## KARI'S CORNER TEACHER ON THE TRAIL



Iditarod 2026 has come to an end and so has "A Letter a Day...The Iditarod Way". I sincerely hope that you not only enjoyed the race updates but also collected numerous activities and ideas along the way. My time in Alaska was truly unforgettable. The first week was spent in classrooms in the Wasilla area where I met incredible teachers and students while doing presentations for Kindergarten through 8th grade. I was then a part of the Jr. Iditarod where I saw racers start, I spent the night in Yentna at their layover location, then returned to watch them finish. The 2 hour return drive by snowmachine at 4:00 a.m. in -35 degree temperatures will clearly stick with me for a long time to come. The second week included the amazing Iditarod Teacher's Conference, a field trip to Martin Buser's Happy Trails Kennel, the musher meet-and-greet, banquet, as well as the ceremonial and official starts. Being Sydnie Bahl's IditaRider... phenomenal. The next week took me to the checkpoint of McGrath. While getting sick and being pulled from the trail for 5 days was not on my travel itinerary, I am so grateful to those who helped along that unexpected journey to health. Thanks to them and some much-needed recovery, I was on my way to Nome for the final week. This experience of watching mushers arrive at the burled arch, spotting several miles out, bush plane adventures, spending time with those lovable dogs in the lot, making new friends, taking my own dog sledding trip solo for 3 miles and a team of 4, as well as handing Richie Beattie the Red Lantern will be etched in my heart forever. I was honored to have been your connection between the race and classroom. Thank you for coming along with me on this once-in-a-lifetime trek into the heart of the Iditarod, The Last Great Race on Earth. Click [here](#) for Kari's lessons.



## Meet Our Artist: Jon VanZyle

Each month, great friend and supporter of Iditarod Education, Jon VanZyle, creates artwork for our Newsletter.

You cannot be around Iditarod long without knowing exactly who this extraordinary and talented man is. He not only completed Iditarod twice, he became the official Iditarod artist in 1973. He has created the yearly Iditarod poster while also being inducted into the Iditarod Hall of Fame in 2004. His art career has spanned over 5 decades where he has become one of the most well-known and respected Alaskan artists. He and his wife, Jona, also an incredible artist in her own right, make their home in Eagle River where they enjoy the nature and wildlife Alaska has to offer.

Jon and Jona are also instrumental in choosing our Trail Mail artwork. The Trail Mail Committee selects the artwork that best enhances our theme and send those to the VanZyles who choose the winner.

Thank you Jon for your support of Iditarod Education!



Photo Credit- Jeff Schultz



## Meet Our 2027 Teacher on the Trail: Tami Schoff

Tami Schoff of Marshwood Middle School in South Berwick, Maine has accepted the position of 2027 Iditarod Teacher on the Trail. She currently teaches 6<sup>th</sup> grade Language Arts, but she has also taught 8<sup>th</sup> grade and has been a Literacy Coach.

We asked Tami what made her want to apply for the Teacher on the Trail position. *“I would LOVE to be the Teacher on the Trail sharing this amazing adventure firsthand with my students and community, to hopefully inspire a new generation of mushers or Iditarod fanatics.”*

Tami will officially take over for Kari Wright during the EDU Summer Conference. Welcome Tami!



Photo by Erin Montgomery

### EDITORS:

Linda Fenton  
Terrie Hanke  
Jim Deprez

**Iditarod** EDU

### CONTRIBUTING WRITERS:

Linda Fenton  
Kari Wright  
Jim Deprez

### PHOTOGRAPHY:

all by iditarod.com unless otherwise credited

### ARTWORK:

Jon VanZyle.

Newsletter feedback, questions, or suggestions?  
email: [linda.fenton@iditarod.com](mailto:linda.fenton@iditarod.com)

Follow Iditarod EDU on [Facebook](#)





## VOCABULARY WORD OF THE MONTH

FROM MERRIAM-WEBSTER DICTIONARY

### IDITAROD TRAIL

geographical name

route system in Alaska usable only during the winter, extending 1100 miles (1770 kilometers) from Seward to Nome, and site of the annual Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race



Village of Nikolai

## Checkpoint of the Month

### NIKOLAI

Population: 125

Back in the gold rush days, this little spot was buzzing with a trading post and roadhouse on the Rainy Pass Trail, linking the Ophir Gold Mining District to Cook Inlet. Fast forward to today, and Nikolai boasts a store, school, community center, church, and even an airstrip! Planes and boats are the usual suspects for moving people, supplies, and mail in and out, but come Iditarod time, it's all about dog teams and snowmachines zooming around.

Summer here is a cozy affair with temps lounging between 40 and 80 degrees. But come winter, it's a frosty dance between 30 below and 30 above! With about 16 inches of precipitation a year, and a whopping six feet of snow, the Kuskokwim River which flows past the village is the boat highway from June through October.

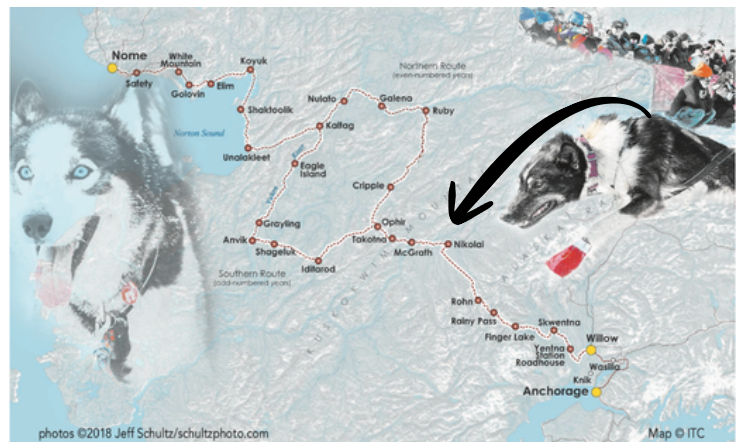
## AND THE WINNER IS . . .

Jessie Holmes, wearing Bib #7 won the 54th running of the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race. This is his 2nd consecutive win, something only five others have accomplished in Iditarod history. Impressively, he had 12 dogs in harness when he crossed under the Burled Arch in Nome.

Not only did he win the race, Holmes also won every special award on the trail, which includes: Alaska Air Transit Spirit of Iditarod Award, GCI Dorothy G. Page Halfway Award, First to the Yukon Award, Bristol Bay Native Corporation Fish First Award, Ryan Air Gold Coast Award and the Northrim Bank Achieve More Award. His winnings from those awards total \$5,500 in cash, \$4,500 in gold nuggets. That will buy a lot of kibble for his K9 athletes.

At the Finisher's Banquet Jessie was awarded a spirit of mushing award known as the Northern Air Cargo Herbie Nayokpuk Memorial Award. Finally, his dogs Polar and Zeus won the Golden Harness award.

Congratulations Jessie!



Nikolai

Jessie Holmes wasn't the only winner in this year's Iditarod. On the last day of the race there is a Finisher's Banquet in Nome. Here are some of the other awards and the recipients:

*Fastest Time from Safety to Nome*

**Jeff Deeter**

*Most Improved Musher Award*

**Hanna Lyrek**

*Sportsmanship Award*

**Ryan Redington**

*Most Inspirational Musher Award*

**Paige Drobny**

*Leonhard Seppala Humanitarian Award*

**Riley Dyche**

*Rookie of the Year*

**Jesse Terry**

*Red Lantern Award*

**Richie Beattie**



Photo by Siri Raitto

**Create Your Own Award**

