



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Iditarod Names Pioneer Mary Shields as 2026 Honorary Musher

Wasilla, Alaska — The Iditarod Trail Committee's (ITC) Board of Directors is proud to announce mushing pioneer Mary Shields as the 2026 Iditarod Honorary Musher, Bib #1, honoring her lasting contributions to The Last Great Race® and to the sport of sled dog racing. The Honorary Musher designation recognizes individuals who have made significant and meaningful impacts on the Iditarod and the mushing community.

Shields, who passed away in mid-July at the age of 80, was a true trailblazer. In 1974, she was one of only two women to enter the second-ever Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race and became the first woman to finish, reaching Nome in 28 days, 18 hours, and 15 minutes. That year, only 26 of the 44 mushers who entered completed the race, which was marked by severe weather and extreme conditions.

Shields' accomplishment helped establish the Iditarod as a race where men and women compete equally on the same trail—an enduring hallmark of the event. For Shields, mushing was never about racing. After finishing in Nome, Shields turned around and mushed 435 miles back toward Galena before flying to Fairbanks.

Beyond the Iditarod, Shields competed in the Yukon Quest and took part in the 1,200-mile Hope Race from Alaska to Russia. She was also a passionate educator and ambassador for the sport, welcoming visitors to her Fairbanks-area kennel through her tour business, Tails of the Trail, and sharing her experiences through books and film, including the PBS-featured *Seasons of the Sled Dog*.

As the first woman to finish the Iditarod, Mary Shields inspired generations of female mushers, including champions and rising stars who continue to follow her path. She was recently inducted into the inaugural Iditarod Hall of Fame Founders Class, alongside other Iditarod founders and pioneers such as Joe Redington Sr., Herbie Nayokpuk, Howard and Julie Farley and others. The Iditarod is proud to honor her, and as the 2026 Iditarod Honorary Musher, her legacy will once again ride the trail to Nome, reminding all who compete and cheer that perseverance, partnership, and passion define The Last Great Race®.

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About the Iditarod

The Iditarod Trail Committee is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving the heritage of Alaska's sled dogs and the historic Iditarod Trail. Each year, the Committee organizes the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race, a 1,000-mile competition from Anchorage to Nome that challenges mushers and their teams to navigate Alaska's extreme terrain and unpredictable conditions. Recognized internationally for its endurance and tradition, the Iditarod showcases the skill, resilience, and spirit of Alaska's sled dog culture. For more information, visit www.iditarod.com.