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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

March 22, 2026

### **Iditarod 54 Special Awards Recipients Honored at Finisher's Banquet in Nome**

The 2026 special awards for the Iditarod 54 were presented to the deserving mushers at the prestigious Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race awards banquet held in Nome, Alaska on the evening of Sunday, March 22, 2026. These special awards honor extraordinary achievements and highlight the spirit of perseverance, sportsmanship, and excellence during one of the world's toughest endurance races. Below are the 2026 award recipients:

#### **Alaska Air Transit Spirit of Iditarod Award**

First presented in 2019 and given to the first musher to reach the McGrath checkpoint, this award is presented by Lead Dog partner, Alaska Air Transit. First introduced in 2019, this award honors the first musher to arrive at the McGrath Checkpoint. The McGrath community shares deep ties to the Iditarod, and the award reflects that connection, featuring beaver fur mushers mitts with Athabaskan beadwork on moose hide, handcrafted by Loretta Maillelle of McGrath, along with a beaver fur hat made by Rosalie Egrass of McGrath.

**2026 Recipient: Jessie Holmes**

#### **GCI Dorothy G. Page Halfway Award**

While there was obviously a "first musher to the halfway point" in every race, there are no records of who that person was prior to 1980 when the first Halfway Award was presented. GCI became the sponsor of this award in 1994. The winning musher receives the award on the spot and then it is symbolically presented in Nome. This Award was given to the first musher to reach the Cripple checkpoint, which is the halfway point of the Northern Route in Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race®. The first musher to reach this checkpoint received a trophy and his/her choice of \$3,000 in gold nuggets symbolic of the history of this interior area of the Iditarod Mining District or a brand-new smartphone with a year of free service from GCI. A beautiful perpetual trophy made of Alaskan birch and marble and featuring a photograph of the late Dorothy G. Page remains year-round at Iditarod headquarters.

**2026 Recipient: Jessie Holmes**



### **First to the Yukon Award**

Presented since 1983, this award (traditionally called the 'First to the Yukon') is given to the musher to arrive at the Ruby checkpoint on the Northern Route. The winning musher received a gourmet dinner prepared by Top Chefs from Locally Grown Restaurants, which owns the popular Anchorage eateries Spenard Roadhouse, Snow City Cafe, Crush Wine Bistro and South Restaurant and Coffeehouse.

**2026 Recipient: Jessie Holmes**

### **Bristol Bay Native Corporation Fish First Award**

This award has been presented by Bristol Bay Native Corporation since 2014 to the first musher to reach the Kaltag checkpoint. This award consists of 25 pounds of fresh Bristol Bay salmon filets, \$2,000 and a wood-burned art piece by BBNC shareholder artist Apay'uq Moore.

**2026 Recipient: Jessie Holmes**

### **Ryan Air Gold Coast Award**

This was first presented in 1987. Ryan Air began sponsoring this award in 2019 and for this year it was given to the first musher to reach the Unalakleet checkpoint. The winning musher received \$1,500 in gold nuggets, a gold pan award and two hand-carved wooden loons.

**2026 Recipient: Jessie Holmes**

### **Northrim Bank Achieve More Award**

This award was first given out in 2018. Northrim Bank presented the award to the first musher to reach the White Mountain checkpoint. The winner received a check for \$2,500 and a one-of-a-kind print.

**2026 Recipient: Jessie Holmes**

### **Nome Kennel Club Fastest Time from Safety to Nome**

One of the longest-standing awards to an Iditarod musher is presented by the Nome Kennel Club. The club awards \$500 to the finishing musher in the top 1/3 of the field who has the fastest time from Safety to Nome.

**2026 Recipient: Jeff Deeter**



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### **Howard Farley Sr. Memorial award presented by the Nome Kennel Club**

Introduced in 2024 by the NKC in memory of the late Howard Farley Sr., this award honors perseverance on the trail. All finishers who do not place in the Top 20 will be entered for their chance to win \$500.

**2026 Recipient: Sam Paperman**

### **Rookie of the Year Award**

There has obviously been a top finishing rookie in every Iditarod. In fact, rookies won the first three races. It wasn't until 1976 that the top-finishing rookie was not the winner. For purposes of this award, a rookie is defined as a musher racing his/her first Iditarod. This year this award is presented by the Peldiak Family to the top-placing rookie, who received a beautiful trophy along with a check for \$2,000.

**2026 Recipient: Jesse Terry**

### **Lynden "Committed through the Last Mile" Red Lantern Award**

The Red Lantern Award acts as a symbol of perseverance for the Iditarod. According to historians, awarding the red lantern for the last place finisher has become an Alaska tradition in sled dog racing. The award of \$1000, presented by Lynden, is given to the final team to cross the finish line in recognition of their perseverance and commitment to completing the job despite unexpected challenges.

**2026 Recipient: Richie Beattie**

### **Glenfarne Alaska LNG Most Improved Musher Award**

The concept for an award for the most improved musher began in 1987, when the mushers honored Ted English. English had finished 18th in his second race and eight the following year. This award is given to the musher who has improved by the most places from their previous career top finish. Two mushers tied for this award this year, and the winners received \$2,000 in cash and a commemorative trophy.

**2026 Recipient: Hanna Lyrek**



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### **Donlin Gold Sportsmanship Award**

A sportsmanship award was initiated in 1977 by the Alaska Native Brotherhood to honor Native musher Ken Chase. The ANB continued to present the Ken Chase Sportsmanship Award through 1982. Since then, the award has been presented by the Iditarod Trail Committee, and various other sponsors, to the person chosen by his/her peers as the best sportsman on the trail. In 2015, Donlin Gold began sponsoring the award. The winner will receive a \$3,000 check and a plaque.

**2026 Recipient: Ryan Redington**

### **Hilcorp Alaska Most Inspirational Musher Award**

Presented since 1986 to the most inspirational musher, the recipient of the Most Inspirational Musher Award is chosen by fellow mushers. The winner receives a paid entry fee for the following year's Iditarod.

**2026 Recipient: Paige Drobny**

### **Northern Air Cargo Herbie Nayokpuk Memorial Award**

This award began in 2007 and is awarded to the individual chosen by the checkers in the checkpoints who best epitomizes Herbie Nayokpuk's spirit of mushing the Iditarod. The winner receives \$1,049 in pocket change and a Northern Air Cargo jacket. This year, the winner also received hand-crafted moccasin slippers as well as ivory earrings and bracelets, presented by the Nayokpuk family.

**2026 Recipient: Jessie Holmes**

### **Golden Clipboard Award**

The annual Golden Clipboard Award is presented by the Iditarod official finishers to the checkpoint the mushers feel is the most helpful along the trail.

**2026 Recipient: McGrath & Takotna**



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### **Leonhard Seppala Humanitarian Award presented by the Pike Dog Wellness First Initiative**

Presented since 1982 to a musher that demonstrates outstanding dog care while remaining competitive throughout the race, the recipient of the Leonhard Seppala Humanitarian Award is chosen by the veterinary team. Starting in Iditarod 2023, this award is now presented by the Pike Dog Wellness First Initiative. Recipient receives an engraved lead crystal trophy and a paid entry fee for the next year's race.

**2026 Recipient: Riley Dyche**

### **City of Nome Lolly Medley Memorial Golden Harness Award**

Lolly Medley, Wasilla harness maker and one of only two women to run the second Iditarod in 1974, began presenting a golden harness to an outstanding lead dog chosen by the mushers, in 1977. Lolly Medley died in August 1996. The award continues in her honor now presented by the City of Nome.

**2026 Recipient: Polar & Zeus from the team of Jessie Holmes**

### **Northern Air Cargo 4-wheeler drawing**

This award was started in 2008 by Northern Air Cargo, who wanted to present something every musher would have a chance to win. For this year a virtual key is presented to each musher who then tries to start the 4-wheeler with their key. There is only one right key and the one who starts the 4-wheeler, wins.

**2026 Recipient: Lauro Eklund**

With the final finisher crossing under the burlled arch in Nome on Friday, March 20, 2026 the Iditarod Trail Committee is able to announce the official breakdown of the race purse by finishing position. This breakdown is determined based on the number of total finishers, coming in at 29 for the 2026 race.

Below is a chart that details the prize money for places 1- 20, as well as the \$2,000 payment for the remaining finishers (21-29), which totals \$650,000 for the 2026 Iditarod prize purse:



Payout By Position	<u>29 finishers</u>
1st	\$80,700
2nd	\$65,700
3rd	\$55,700
4th	\$45,700
5th	\$40,700
6th	\$35,700
7th	\$34,200
8th	\$31,700
9th	\$29,700
10th	\$27,700
11th	\$23,800
12th	\$22,500
13th	\$21,200
14th	\$20,000
15th	\$18,800
16th	\$17,550
17th	\$16,450
18th	\$15,400
19th	\$14,900
20th	\$13,900
21st-29th	\$18,000
<b>Total Prize Money</b>	<b>\$650,000</b>

As the 54th running of the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race comes to a close, we extend our heartfelt congratulations to every musher and canine athlete who made the journey across the state. Each team that traveled the historic trail to Nome carries forward a legacy deeply rooted in Alaska’s history—one that reflects resilience, respect for the land, and the enduring bond between mushers and their dogs. From the first team to the final finisher and those who started but did not finish, the 2026 Iditarod stands as a powerful reminder of the grit, tradition, and community spirit that continue to define this iconic race for generations to come.

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