



For Immediate Release
By: Spc. Margaret J. Moonin

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Alaska Air National Guardsman Races for Good Cause *Pilot uses love of sled dog racing as conduit to create disabled children's fund*

CAMP DENALI, Alaska –An Alaska Air National Guard pilot exemplifies the qualities of honor, duty, and country as he braves the elements and pushes the boundaries while piloting a new type of craft – a sled dog team – in the 2009 Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race.

Using his love of sled dog racing as a way of promoting awareness and raising funds for children with disabilities, Lt. Col. Blake Matray, Alaska Air National Guard, 168th Air Refueling Wing, KC-135 pilot and weapons and tactics chief, is hoping to bring more attention and financial assistance to children with disabilities.

Matray and his wife, Erin, founded Sled Dog Fund, Inc., a non-profit organization dedicated using sled dog racing to promote awareness and raise funds for the support of children with disabilities and their families.

“Over the years, I have donated money to the Special Olympics, but I always felt like I wanted to do more,” Matray said. “I just needed to find the right niche, somewhere to raise funds and promote awareness, but being a musher, a pilot for the Alaska Air National Guard and working a full time job didn’t leave me much time.”

Matray’s love of Siberian Huskies, racing behind a team of 16 dogs, and his desire to help children with special needs was the catalyst to the development of his organization, which last year raised more than \$4,000 that was directly donated to support special-needs children across Alaska.

“The idea of using sled dogs and dog sledding adventures to raise funds became the answer and a conduit for me to combine two of my passions together for a great cause,” Matray said.

“We are always proud of our Guardsmen and women and what they do for this country,” said Alaska Senator Lisa Murkowski. “But when you see them out as participants in a race like the Iditarod, just pushing the limits of their own endurance and that of their team for a great cause, you appreciate what they do even more.”

Matray runs the Brown Dog Outfitters kennel in Two Rivers, northeast of Fairbanks. He has competed in the Tustumena 100, Tustumena 200, the Don Bowers 200 and the Denali 300 sled dog race. In 2003, Matray ran the Iditarod but was forced to scratch when his dogs became very ill.

“I ran this race before and was forced to scratch, so I expect it to be a challenge to get to Nome, but in my book, the challenges faced every day by special-needs children and their families is much harder than what I face on the trail,” Matray said. “Their strength and inspiration is what is driving me to run this race. Their struggle is one of the reasons among others that I signed up to race this year. They are the real heroes, and I just hope that I can shine a little visibility on Sled Dog Fund, Inc. and help their cause by racing.”

Sled Dog Fund, Inc. holds an annual fund raising banquet and silent auction called Tails from the Trails where quest mushers tell of their adventures while competing in the “Last Great Race on Earth.”

All donations to Sled Dog Fund, Inc. are used to fund hospital programs, support research on developmental disabilities and assist with parental education programs and sponsorship of individual disabled children who wish to compete in adventure races of all kinds.

For more information on Sled Dog Fund, Inc. visit www.sleddogfund.org.

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Lt. Col. Blake Matray, Alaska Air National Guard, 168th Air Refueling Wing, KC-135 pilot and weapons and tactics chief, gets ready for the start of the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race XXXVII in downtown Anchorage March 7. Matray is racing to raise awareness and funds for the support of children with disabilities and their families. Photo: Spc. Margaret J. Moonin, 134th Public Affairs Detachment

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At the start of the 2009 Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race in downtown Anchorage, Lt. Col. Blake Matray, Alaska Air National Guard, 168th Air Refueling Wing, KC-135 pilot and weapons and tactics chief, spends some time with his team. Photo: Photo: Spc. Margaret J. Moonin, 134th Public Affairs Detachment

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Lt. Col. Blake Matray, Alaska Air National Guard, 168th Air Refueling Wing, KC-135 pilot and weapons and tactics chief, and his IditaRider prepare to race through downtown Anchorage at the start of the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race XXXVII. Matray is racing to raise awareness and funds for the support of children with disabilities and their families. Photo: Spc. Margaret J. Moonin, 134th Public Affairs Detachment