



For Immediate Release
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Alaska Air National Guard Pilot Uses Love of Sled Dogs to Help Others
Pilot organizes charity event after scratching from Iditarod to save fellow musher's dog

CAMP DENALI, Alaska – Only weeks after choosing to let go of his life-long dream of finishing the Iditarod Sled Dog Race, an Alaska Air National Guard KC-135 pilot is working diligently to host an annual charity event that uses the adventures of sled dog racing to raise awareness and funds for children with special needs.

Lt. Col. Blake Matray, 168th Air Refueling Wing KC-135 pilot and weapons and tactics chief, has been busy organizing “Tails from the Trail,” a charity banquet and silent auction that will be held at the Fairbanks Princess Hotel April 24.

Just a few weeks ago, Matray was racing in Iditarod XXVII, as a rookie. He scratched approximately six hours outside of the Iditarod checkpoint, roughly 402 miles from Nome.

Matray made the decision to scratch after pausing to help fellow Iditarod rookie Kim Darst, who had stopped on the trail after one of her dogs looked to be hypothermic. With temperatures quickly plummeting past 20 below zero, deep snow drifts covering the trail, and fierce winds causing limited visibility, Matray made the only decision he felt was right – to stay with Darst and her dogs.

“The most important thing to me in this race was to get to Nome safely and with healthy dogs,” Matray said. “I could not just leave her there with her dog in serious trouble to finish the race.

“I expected this race to be a challenge in which I would face many hardships,” Matray said. “I ran this race for many reasons: my love of Siberian Huskies, sled dog racing, the thrill of finishing the ‘Last Great Race on Earth,’ but mostly to garner visibility for children with developmental disabilities.”

“Tails from the Trail” was started by The Sled Dog Fund Inc., a non-profit organization Matray and his wife, Erin, founded in 2007. They created The Sled Dog Fund Inc. as a way of combining the adventures of sled dog racing with raising awareness of and funds for children with disabilities.

After donating to the Special Olympics for many years, Matray said he always felt like he wanted to do more.

“But with being a musher, a pilot for the Alaska Air National Guard and working a full time job it did not leave me much time,” Matray said.

The Sled Dog Fund, Inc. was organized in such a way that donations can be made through several different formats. First through direct internet or phone donations, second by sponsoring certain participating mushers per every mile they cover in any of the premier sled dog races, and third through the annual Sled Dog Fund Inc. “Tails from the Trail” charity banquet and silent auction.

“In my book the challenges faced every day by special-needs children and their families is much harder than anything I faced on the trail,” said Matray, who has made the decision that this year would be his last attempt to finish the Iditarod. “Their strength and inspiration is what continues to drive me to finish the work I have started with The Sled Dog Fund Inc.”