



For Immediate Release
By: Spc. Margaret J. Moonin

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Alaska Army Guardsman Races to Nome as the First “Mentor on the Trail”
National Guard partners with Iditarod on drug abuse prevention in schools

CAMP DENALI, Alaska – As sled dog racers set out to conquer more than 1,049 miles of the toughest and most stunning terrain known to man, one Alaska Army National Guard Soldier will be attempting to conquer an even tougher force – teaching Alaska’s youth and youth across the nation to “Stay on Track” by staying sober and off drugs.

During the 2009 Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race, Staff Sgt. Russell Throckmorton, Drug Demand Reduction non-commissioned officer, will partner with teachers to provide the most compelling drug education program available as the first Mentor on the Trail.

The Alaska National Guard and the Iditarod Trail Committee are working together to reach out to children in schools across the state and nation in a collaborative effort with the Iditarod Education Department. Throckmorton will hop from community to community, along the race path, with this year’s Teacher on the Trail, Cathy Walters of Asheville, N.C.

“With our Stay on Track Drug Demand Reduction program, the Mentor on the Trail will go to different villages to bring positive solutions to high-risk behavior in the schools,” said Warrant Officer Three Scott Frickson, Alaska Army National Guard, Drug Demand Reduction, rural education drug program director.

The Mentor on the Trail program was brought to life when the Alaska National Guard presented the Stay on Track Drug Demand Reduction program as a partner to the Iditarod’s national education program, Teacher on the Trail.

“We were looking for a program that shared our hopes and dreams, as well as a positive relationship in the communities and schools,” said Stan Hooley, executive director of the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race. “We found it in our new partnership with the Alaska National Guard’s Stay on Track program. The Alaska National Guard has been instrumental in bringing mentors into rural and urban communities, and we are very excited to add the education and training they offer to our Iditarod national education program by implementing the Mentor on the Trail program.”

In 2008, the Alaska National Guard program reached more than 8,800 Alaskans and provided countless Stay on Track classroom sessions to communities throughout the state.

“Reducing drug demand in Alaska is a significant issue,” said Alaska Senator Lisa Murkowski. “Programs like this are key to providing our children with the information and experience needed to be successful in this day and age.”

By partnering with the Iditarod’s national education program, the Alaska National Guard will engage not only students in communities across the state, but students across the nation by linking educators and communities who desire to help youth “Stay on Track.”

This year the mentor is an Alaska Army National Guard Soldier, but next year every Guard member in the nation will be allowed to compete to be the next Mentor on the Trail. There have been more than 10 Teachers on the Trail and Frickson hopes that the new Mentor on the Trail program will become an integral part of the Iditarod educational program in the years to come.

“This will give Guardsmen around the nation the opportunity to share in the excitement and adventure of the Iditarod while bringing positive solutions for at-risk behavior to our nation’s youth,” Frickson said.

A direct link to the Alaska National Guard's Stay on Track program can be located on the Iditarod's Education Department web page by clicking on the For Teachers tab. This is a no-cost program that includes training, materials and implementation by highly skilled National Guardsmen nationwide.

“We will be educational partners with the Teacher on the Trail,” said Throckmorton. “All of our staff is trained in teaching life skills and risk assessment, which gives youth powerful tools to be successful in achieving their dreams. The goal of the program is to set youth up for success by teaching them how to empower themselves, make smart choices and be positive peer role models.”

Stay on Track is an innovative, fun, and comprehensive drug-abuse prevention program composed of interactive lessons and team-building opportunities designed to reach out to youth nationwide. Because of the prominence of alcohol, tobacco, and drug use among middle school students, the Alaska National Guard Drug Demand Reduction team puts special emphasis on 6th, 7th and 8th grade students.

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CUTLINES:

Lisa Murkowski

Senator Lisa Murkowski proudly announces the partnership between the Alaska National Guard’s Drug Demand Reduction Program and the Iditarod Education Program prior to the ceremonial start of the 2009 Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race in downtown Anchorage March 7. The partnership has helped to create the new Mentor on the Trail program, which will shadow the Teacher on the Trail and provide interactive lessons on ways to significantly reduce drug

demand in Alaska and the nation. Photo: Spc. Margaret J. Moonin, 134th Public Affairs Detachment

1st “Mentor on the Trail”

Alaska Army National Guard Staff Sgt. Russell Throckmorton, Drug Demand Reduction non-commissioned officer, helps Alaska Senator Lisa Murkowski announce the new Mentor on the Trail program prior to the ceremonial start of the 2009 Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race in downtown Anchorage March 7. Throckmorton will partner with teachers to provide the most compelling drug education program available as the first Mentor on the Trail, while hopping from community to community along the race path. Photo: Spc. Margaret J. Moonin, 134th Public Affairs Detachment