

# CHASING THE NORTH STAR

**W**hen musher Sue Morgan glided into Nome, Alaska, with her dogsled team as the 72nd finisher in the 2008 Iditarod, she fulfilled a heartfelt personal goal. The Utah State University geology lecturer not only completed

the grueling, 1,117-mile journey in 14 days, 31 minutes and 30 seconds, but forged a special connection with her canine teammates along with a breath-taking collection of memories.



Not content to savor her achievement on her own, Morgan established a competition in USU's home community to allow others to share in her experience.

"I just want my adventure to benefit others," she says. "I am interested in science education and believe it is important to reach out to students in grade school."

Morgan sponsored a contest to send one Cache Valley teacher to the 2008 Idita-Summer Camp for Teachers in Wasilla, Alaska. Anitra Jensen, a 5th grade teacher at the Edith Bowen Laboratory School on the USU campus, was the lucky winner who heads north to experience first-hand the rich science and history behind North America's "Last Great Race."

"No musher has ever approached us about sponsoring a teacher so this is a 'first' and a very important 'first,'" says Diane Johnson, education director for the Iditarod and coordinator of the summer camps for teachers. "Sue's offer is really incredibly exciting."

USU geologist Sue Morgan, who completed the 2008 Iditarod, wants to share the excitement of the race with young people. She visits area schools with her canine teammates and sponsored a local teacher's participation in an Iditarod teachers' conference. *Photos by Leanne Quirk.*

Johnson says thousands of educators from all 50 states and many other countries have participated in the race's teacher conferences, which are held twice a year. The conferences offer ideas to integrate the varied aspects of the Iditarod into the teaching of math, science, geography, history, art and writing.

"Teachers have recognized that there's something about the Iditarod that captures the minds of students of all ages and hooks them into learning," she says. "It's great that the connection of the race to classroom education is recognized by mushers, too. Perhaps more mushers will follow Sue's lead."

Johnson notes that Morgan's gesture is especially generous given that travel to Alaska "from the lower 48" is expensive. As an Iditarod musher, Morgan has already made a significant personal investment to participate in the race and procured her own sponsors to fund her sled dog team's endeavor.

USU's College of Science and Department of Elementary Education provided organizational support for Morgan's teacher contest. College of Science Dean Mary Hubbard says the competition creates a great opportunity for local educators and students.

"What is teaching if there isn't learning?" Hubbard says. "And how much better student learning can be if the teacher has been learning, too. It's a pleasure for me to see our College of Science teachers finding creative ways to share their experiences and involve teachers in the community."

Morgan's passion for dogsledding was kindled back in 1999 when she began competing in local competitions. As her love for the sport grew, she set her sights on the Iditarod, assembled a canine team, gathered the equipment and pursued the sponsorships needed to tackle the challenge.



Sue Morgan and her canine team braved steep mountain passes, whiteout conditions and sub-zero temperatures to complete the famous 1,117-mile journey through Alaska's wilderness.

She made her first Iditarod attempt in 2006 but was forced to drop out after a crash that resulted in a rib fracture. Undaunted, Morgan began planning for Iditarod 2008. Despite the demands on her time and resources, she made speaking about the race and the sport with local elementary school students a priority.

"Most kids love dogs," Morgan says. "I also love dogs and dog sledding. I feel that sharing the excitement of the Iditarod is a unique way to help others learn about dogs, human and canine teamwork and the wild landscape of North America's last frontier."

Contact: Sue Morgan, [sue.morgan@usu.edu](mailto:sue.morgan@usu.edu), 435-797-2176

Writer: Mary-Ann Muffoletto, 435-797-3517  
[maryann.muffoletto@usu.edu](mailto:maryann.muffoletto@usu.edu)  
June 2008