

# Iditarod

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have never been outside the state, they never ate at McDonalds and they never heard of beanie babies."

That may be enough incentive to entice adults to Golovin, but the difficult nature of life in a town with a population of 161, linked to the outside world only by plane, is reflected in letters sent to Lake-Noxen students. "I wish I was still in Unakleet (an urban area south of Golovin and site of the annual wrestling/cheerleading competition attended by most of the region's youth)," said Shanelle Olson. "It is so boring here after being there. You probably wouldn't think it was boring here because you haven't lived here before, but if I was in Unakleet and I got bored I would go to Elim, White Mountain, or any other place besides

here."

The gift of beanie babies and cameras brightened the lives of Shanelle and her classmates and offered Lake-Noxen students a glimpse at life in Golovin. "Thanks for the camera and Teenie Beenie Baby," said George Sinclair Lewis. "My teacher, Emily Becker is mad about the camera because we play with it a lot and make her crazy."

Golovin teachers, most of whom were born and raised in the lower 48, are more apt to succumb to homesickness and loneliness than to be driven batty by flash bulbs. "The kids in Golovin have a new teacher every year because the old ones always leave," said Holdredge. "That makes it harder for them to keep up with other students the same age."

Becker describes the students



POST PHOTO/KASIA McDONOUGH

Lake-Noxen third graders collected 400 lb. of dog food and supplies as part of their Iditarod project. The items were donated to the Luzerne County SPCA. From left in photo: Evelyn June Brislin, Andrea Butchko, Sarah Sorber, Justine Martin, Dylan Chewey, Wade Ian Howell, Lindsay Williams, Tiffany Ritz, Julie Vitack, Alora Russell and Eddie Traver.

in her fifth grade class as typical children caught between their native culture and mainstream "American" culture. "Students in Golovin as in the rest of Alaska are a lot like American students everywhere," she said. "They are interested in professional wrestling, the NBA, Nintendo, people of the opposite sex and snowmobiles. However, many people in Golovin do not have modern conveniences such as running water and indoor toilets."

The differences between Lake-Noxen and Golovin students are eclipsed by attributes the two groups share. "I like sending letters to them and I like when we get letters too," said Kelsey Coole, a Lake-Noxen third grader. "We also got a whole bunch of pictures. My

favorite ones are of dogs and mushers."

Like their Alaskan counterparts Back Mountain youngsters are fascinated with the Iditarod and many of them happily sacrificed recess time to talk about what they have learned. "I think studying the Iditarod is really cool," said Leslie Everett. "We're reading stories about the race and I learned that the mushers take really good care of their dogs and they make special socks for them to wear in the snow."

Lindsey Williams's vocabulary has expanded to include Iditarod racing commands. "Well see, the mushers say 'gee' if they want the dogs to turn right and 'wo' if they want to stop. 'Haw' means left, 'hike' means go ahead or you could

just say the lead dogs name. And sometimes mushers yell 'go ahead ahead' - that means straight," she explained.

These terms will come in handy later this year when the students compete in a simulated Iditarod race. "I love practicing for the Iditarod," said Julie Vitack. "One of us is the musher and the other is the lead dog and we have to follow the signs because nobody knows which way to go. It's really hard but its fun."

Lake-Noxen's version of the Alaskan race is planned for January, weather permitting. "We're still putting everything together," said Holdredge. "Hoof 'n' Paw and some other businesses have donated banners that we are going to put along the course so that it

"I like sending letters to them and I like when we get letters too."

Kelsey Coole  
Lake-Noxen 3rd grader

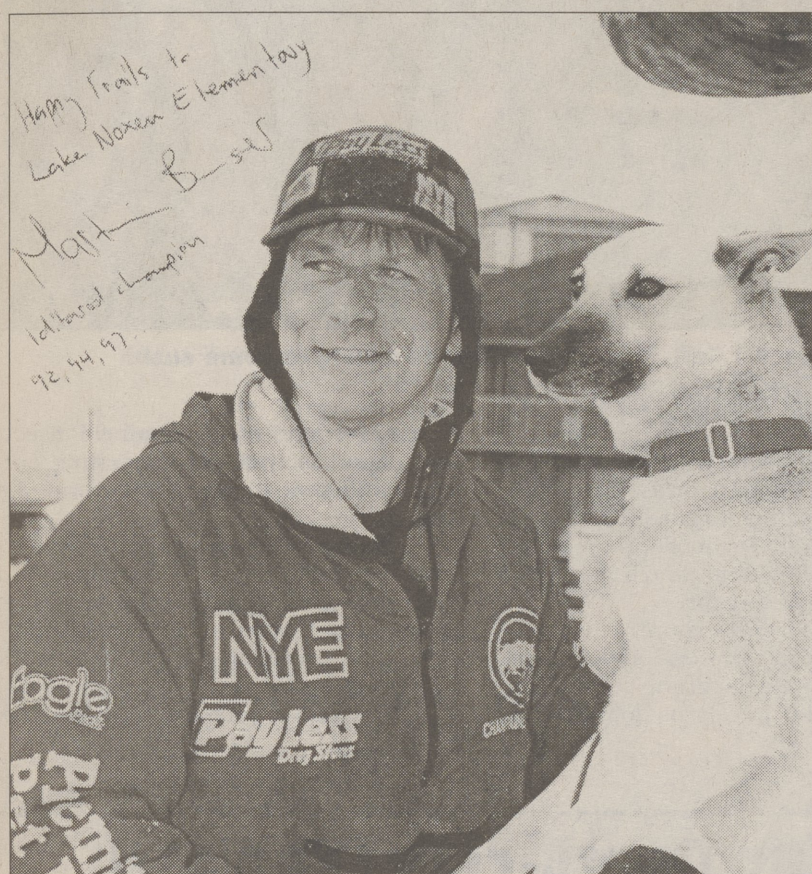
looks like a real Iditarod."

While teachers are working hard to ensure the scaled-down competition is as authentic as possible, students have been busy collecting dog food and other supplies to help some real-life animals. "The students collected over 400 pounds of dog food which we're donating to the SPCA," said Holdredge.

Pets waiting to be adopted surely appreciate the food and so do SPCA officials who were overwhelmed by the students' efforts. "The children and their families were extremely generous," said Karen Steinmetz, Humane Educator for the SPCA of Luzerne County. "I've never seen anything quite like this. They collected so much food that we actually have to send a truck out here to transport it."

The SPCA reciprocated by providing informative and entertaining lessons about responsible pet ownership. "I use puppets to teach the students about bite prevention and proper handling. We also talk a little about animal cruelty and pet adoption," said Steinmetz. "At this age, the kids have so many questions and stories to tell about their own pets; it makes my job a lot of fun."

The Iditarod project has helped make education more enjoyable for everyone involved and Susan Young is confident the students are learning more as a result. "I definitely think they retain more because they're not just reading about something; they are actually doing something," she said.



Three-time Iditarod champion Martin Booser is one of many competitors who regularly correspond with Lake-Noxen students.

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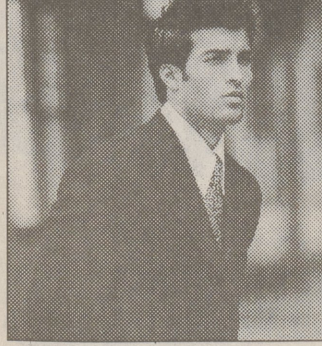


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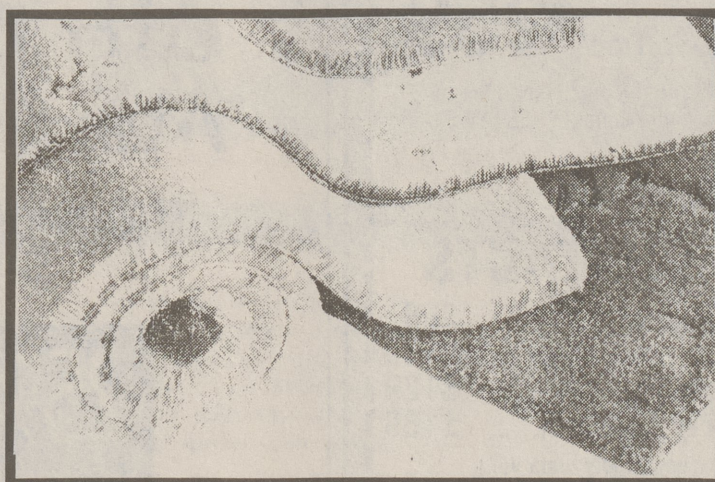
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