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www.kniktrailblazers.org

Facebook: Knik Iditarod Trailblazers

Facebook: Knik 200 Joe Redington Sr. Memorial Sled Dog Race

**TODAY'S KNIK IDITAROD TRAILBLAZERS ARE FOCUSED ON
BUILDING THE IDITAROD TRAIL OF TOMORROW**

A significant stretch of the historic Iditarod Trail in Knik, Alaska is accessible to trail users only during the frozen months due to marshes and wetlands that dominate the summer terrain.

It always bothered Iditarod musher and lifelong Knik resident Ray Redington Jr. that a trail so historic and beautiful could only be used for five months out of twelve. Redington pondered, "How could the Knik Iditarod Trail become an all-seasons trail and be enjoyed by more people?"

Rather than let the question linger, Redington followed in the visionary footsteps of his grandfather and Iditarod founder Joe Redington Sr.; he set out to solve that question.

By enlisting the support of community members and friends – many who also use the trail for winter mushing – Ray Redington resurrected the Knik Iditarod Trailblazers nonprofit organization that was originally formed over 30 years ago. Its revitalized goal is to improve, maintain and promote the use of the Iditarod trail between Knik and Skwentna as a multi-use trail to benefit the Alaskan community and visitors, in addition to making it an all-seasons trail. Although Redington only mushes dog teams on the trail, he sees trail improvements as opening a door for other outdoor recreationalist to run, hike, fat tire bike, skijor, bikejor, or cross country ski.

It's a big undertaking, but initial progress has been swift. The Trailblazers, with Redington as president, mobilized its supporters during July, August and September this year to voice concerns at Matsu Borough assembly meetings about a dangerous road and Iditarod trail intersection that put trail users and car drivers at risk of impact, injury and death. The result? The installation of an underpass culvert for trail users was approved and the project is underway and on schedule to be completed by November of this year.

The nonprofit's priority initiatives for the next year include hardening the trail in areas where marshy conditions currently prohibit warm-weather use, creating and installing directional signage along the trail, and hosting two sled dog races on January 1, 2022: the Knik 200 Joe Redington Sr. Memorial Sled Dog Race and the Knik 100 Bruce Braden Sled Dog Race. In the future, the Knik Iditarod Trailblazers hope to attract and host competitive events for non-mushing sports and activities, such as a fat tire bike or cross country skiing race.

The Knik Iditarod Trailblazers group is governed by unpaid board members and relies on membership fees, grants, financial and in-kind donations, and sponsorships to fund projects. It is currently seeking to increase its membership and funding sources. "Trail improvements and maintenance are physically doable, but we need community involvement and financial resources to help make it a reality," says Redington. "Building a trail system that we can all enjoy and be proud of depends on being able to afford the materials and equipment to make it happen. We invite people to volunteer with us in a hands-on capacity or to lend a different kind of hand with their financial support. No donation is too small to make a difference and all donations are appreciated."

Redington adds, "My grandfather Joe and his peers brought the idea of Iditarod to life, and now it's an event that is known worldwide. Anything is possible when you combine a good idea with passionate people, and that's what we have with the Knik Iditarod Trailblazers and our plans to improve and better the Iditarod Trail. That trail is such an important part of our past that it has to be a big part of our future."

People interested in learning more about or supporting the Knik Iditarod Trailblazers are invited to visit the nonprofit on Facebook or at the website www.kniktrailblazers.org.

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