

# Jerseyville hosts its own summer Iditarod race with sixth graders instead of sled dogs

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer  
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**JERSEYVILLE** - Every sixth grader in Jersey County is going to take part in its 22nd annual "Iditarod" race.

The 21 teams - with 17 coming from Illini Middle School and four coming from St. Francis Holy Ghost Catholic School - raced a course nearly a mile and a half long, which winds through the Jersey County Fairgrounds on the outskirts of Jerseyville. Like the Iditarod in Alaska, teams will pull sleds on a course with a musher at the helm, but instead of sled dogs, the sleds will be pulled by sixth graders while one student acts as the "musher" in each team.

Illini Middle School sixth grade teacher Kathy Shalley is one of nine teachers from across the county who help put together the race every year.

"Obviously sleds don't have sliders and snow," Shalley said. "Instead, we have wheels and grass."



Another similarity between the actual Iditarod and the Jerseyville version is the concept of "layovers." There are two such layovers during the Alaskan race, which is much longer than the Jerseyville fairgrounds. While the Jerseyville race takes an hour to an hour and a half to complete for the winning team, Shalley said, the Alaskan race takes days. Therefore, layovers in the Jerseyville race are relatively short.

Timing for the race is not only during the spring months in which students are awaiting summer vacation, but it is also directly following the students studying the Alaskan race.

Students participating in the race had t-shirts celebrating the event. The winning team also gets t-shirts and a little bit of money for winning, Shalley said. Second and third place finishers receive similar prizes.

Even the team coming in last place receives a prize. Shalley said the final team to finish will win a very special "Red Lantern" prize.





