



MEDIA RELEASE

Finish & Awards Banquet

February 17, 2016 (Fairbanks, AK) – Hosted by the Westmark Fairbanks Hotel & Conference Center, this year’s Finish & Awards Banquet began with a Presenting of the Colours by the UAF US Army ROTC, a performance of the Canadian and American national anthems by Theresa Bauer-Burger, and an invocation by Pastor Jim Hardenbrook.

Taking the stage next were Don Honea, traditional Chief of the Tanana Chiefs Conference, North Star Borough Mayor Karl Kassel, and Jim Matherly, Mayor of Fairbanks. Their welcoming remarks were followed by a surprise appearance by Quest cofounder LeRoy Shank. Shank archly lamented the fact that there has never been an award for the second last musher to finish, a position he found himself in more than once, and so he presented this year’s 13th place musher, Ben Good, with a race button from the inaugural 1984 Yukon Quest.

Next came a 10-minute video comprising the very best of the footage shot by the Quest’s official Visual Content Team. The film garnered spontaneous cheers from the mushers and the crowd, particularly the gripping sequence of Ryne Olson tackling Eagle Summit in near-whiteout conditions.

After recognition of sponsors, volunteers, and YQ300 competitors, Head Veterinarian Dr. Nina Hansen introduced and praised the members of the Quest Veterinary Team. Race Marshal Fabian Schmitz did the same for the Race Officials.

In customary fashion, each musher was then introduced in the reverse order in which they finished and given an opportunity to share trail stories from this year’s race, as well as give thanks to their friends and supporters. Fourteenth place and Red Lantern recipient Sébastien Dos Santos Borges was first, saying that with so much still left to learn about mushing he will probably always be a rookie. Dos Santos Borges continued by saying he has made so many good lifelong friends this year, and that “Quest people” (i.e., mushers, volunteers, officials, vets, et al.) are a rare type of family.

Thirteenth place Ben Good of North Pole, Alaska thanked his wife Kim first and foremost, Torsten Kohnert for the advice not to skip the hospitality stops, and his dogs, particularly stand-in leader Poppie.

Dawson City, Yukon's Brian Wilmshurst, who finished his fifth Yukon Quest in 12th place, thanked family and sponsors, and his veteran team made up of more than a few seven and 10 year-olds (some with 6,000 miles), for whom this will be their last long-distance race before retirement to a nice couch. "Will I do the Quest next year?" came Wilmshurst's rhetorical summation. "I'm going to tell you 'No' right now and then hopefully see you next year anyway."

Eleventh place Rob Cooke, now a four-time Quest veteran said this year's race was the most fun yet. After thanking his wife, brother, handlers, and the trailbreakers, Cooke related the story of falling into Mile 101 checkpoint's "bacon trap," which delayed his departure and left him fighting through a whiteout atop Rosebud Summit.

Dave Dalton, this year's 10th place finisher, used his time at the microphone to take up a collection for a proper trophy for future Quest champions, to be named after cofounder LeRoy Shank. The veteran musher, having just completed his 27th Yukon Quest, also challenged both mayors in attendance to add "Home of the Yukon Quest" to the "Welcome to Fairbanks" signs.

Two Rivers, Alaska musher and ninth place finisher Ryne Olson thanked the race officials for being there when needed to make the tough decisions, and expressed gratitude to all the host communities and hospitality stops along the way, particularly the "lifesaving" brownies in the middle of nowhere (provided every year by Nate & Ruby from Wood Island, between Trout Creek and Eagle).

Eighth place rookie Jessie Royer, said the Quest is the most fun she's had with her dog team. She, too, was blown away by the hospitality stops, saying she likely gained weight from all the food on offer over the course of the race.

Rookie of the Year, Katherine Keith, who finished seventh, stated that she underestimated the difficulty of Quest (hills, especially), but with its vast and breathtaking scenery the event was a spectacular journey and more than she had hoped for. She also passed along a thank you from her young daughter to the good people at SPOT Live Tracker for allowing her to keep tabs on her mother from back home in Kotzebue so she didn't have to worry.

Torsten Kohnert, this year's sixth place finisher, thanked his lead dog, Jill, for not letting him quit on Eagle Summit. Referring to events from last year's race, Kohnert joked that his fourth Quest was most notable for what it did not have: namely a charging moose and a Norwegian (2016 seventh place finisher Tom Frode Johanson) chasing him the entire way.

Ed Hopkins of Tagish, Yukon who finished fifth overall in this, his ninth Quest, thanked his wife and YQ300 champion Michelle Phillips, Quest fans who follow the race, and the dedicated trailbreakers and volunteers.

Three-time Quest veteran and fourth place finisher Paige Drobny, singled out her dog Chevelle for as a standout performer for squealing at random things (coughs, trees, snow, etc.) and making the team go faster in the process.

Third place Allen Moore, a two-time Quest Champion, boasted of bluffing Matt Hall into rejoining the trail after he'd already camped for the night 50 miles outside of Dawson, but also how Hall then did the same thing to him 75 miles beyond Dawson and how Moore didn't see him again until the finish line.

In light of the strong showing by female mushers in this year's race, second place musher Hugh Neff declared this the "Year of the Woman." Last year's champion gave full credit to Matt Hall for "one of the all-time great runs" for his gutsy moves on the Dawson to Eagle section of the trail.

2017 Yukon Quest Champion Matt Hall took the stage to a standing ovation for his first Quest win. The 25-year-old thanked the trailbreakers on both sides of the border, the volunteers and race officials, and his handlers. Hall said the best moment of this, his fourth Quest, was seeing his parents at the finish line, as it's no easy task for them to get in from his hometown of Eagle, Alaska.

Following the mushers remarks, Race Marshal Fabian Schmitz announced the recipients of this year's awards.

Paige Drobny won the Veterinarian's Choice Award for being the musher who best demonstrates outstanding canine care while remaining competitive during the entire race. Selected by the Quest veterinary team, the award is good for \$1,000USD toward veterinary services from Alpine Veterinary Medical Clinic in Whitehorse.

Selected by the Quest race officials, the Challenge of the North Award is given to the musher who best exemplifies the spirit of the Yukon Quest. This year's recipient was Torsten Kohnert, who receives a stained glass rendition of the Quest sitting dog logo.

The Sportsmanship Award went to Ben Good. Sponsored by Suz Kiskin, this award of a handcrafted fur hat is decided by the mushers themselves, and is presented to the competitor who demonstrates outstanding sportsmanship along the trail.

Rookie of the Year honours were bestowed upon Katherine Keith of Kotzebue, Alaska, for being the first rookie musher to cross the finish line. Keith walked away with a handcrafted jade dog team and knife.

New this year was the Pelly Crossing Award, bestowed upon the first musher to reach the Pelly Crossing checkpoint. The first-ever winner was Hugh Neff, who was awarded a pair of fur mittens donated by Selkirk First Nation to honour the partnership between the First Nation, the Quest and its mushers.

Sponsored by Schmidt Mining, the Joe Fellers Dawson Award of four ounces of Klondike placer gold also went to Hugh Neff for being the first musher to reach Dawson City and go on to finish the race.

The Kinross Fort Knox Red Lantern Award went to Sébastien Dos Santos Borges. Presented annually to the race's last official finisher, the Red Lantern commemorates the tradition of keeping a light on for all mushers still out on the trail.

The evening closed with the presentation of the Golden Harness Award. In honour of their loyalty, endurance, and perseverance throughout the race, Matt Hall's two lead dogs, Keeper and Anchor, received custom-made golden harnesses sponsored by RAMCO, and steaks prepared by the Head Chef of the Westmark Fairbanks Hotel & Conference Center.

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