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Fur Rendezvous going strong at 70

Friday, February 25, 2005 - by Yvonne Ramsay

Anchorage, Alaska - This has been a year of renewal for Fur Rendezvous. The longtime winter festival has had some troubled times recently, but organizers say Rondy is being reinvented.

Whether it's the nice weather or a newfound appreciation by longtime Rondy fans, organizers say this year is better than ever. The 70th annual Fur Rondy celebration started with a bang -- a spectacular fireworks display -- and, according to organizers, it's still going strong.



Mike Nederbrock/KTUU-TV



Mike Nederbrock/KTUU-TV

"It's going great," says Mary Pignalberi, Rondy's executive director. "It's funny how many people have asked me that, because we've had some glitches in the past. But it's very so-far-so-good, fingers-crossed, very well. Well, well, well."

Just a month ago, Rondy organizers were worried that the lack of snow and lack of money for the winner's purse would force organizers to call off the World Championship Sled Dog Race. But thanks to a little help from Mother Nature and three generous donors, the three-day sprint race is going on as scheduled and 17 teams are entered.

Fans say they couldn't be happier. "It's a beautiful day. It's Fur Rondy. It's the start of the dog races. What better place to be?" says Eagle River resident Jim Taylor. He's lived in Alaska nearly 30 years and says he makes his way to Fur Rondy events each year.

"Fur Rendezvous is just the greatest wintertime party in the world," he says. "I've been coming to it forever. I bought this hat when I first moved up here and it comes out once a year or twice, for Fur Rendezvous and then the running of the Iditarod."



Mike Nederbrock/KTUU-TV



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Many new Rondy events are selling out, and this year marks the first time in six years that the World Championship Sled Dog Race has had more than 16 racing teams.

"It's a great outdoor experience," says Taylor. "Besides in the wintertime, people start to get a little twitchy being inside and it's a good way to work that off."

are getting into the swing of things. "I love Alaska. Alaska is nice place to be. This is



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awesome place," says Koji Satake. He used to live in Alaska, but 10 years ago moved back to Japan. Since then, he's come back every year with a group of friends to share the experience of Rondy.

"I used to live here for nine years," he says. "Ever since that time, in the wintertime, I bring up people to see the northern lights and to see the sled dog race."



Mike Nederbrock



Mike Nederbrock/KTUU-TV

From everyday Alaskans to fun-loving tourists, Fur Rondy fans say there's something for everyone. "Come out, enjoy. Spring's coming, and just get out and enjoy it because there's so many things to do here in this wonderful city and I love it here," says Nancy Walters.

The Fur Rondy fun continues through next weekend, and organizers say this Alaskan tradition will last for years to come.

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