

Juggling restart

By **KAREN MONTOYA**

Frontiersman reporter

Behind every good Iditarod dog sled team stands a woman.

Her name is Julie Grizzle. And she has spent the past six years coordinating the Iditarod SledDog restart at the Old Wasilla Airstrip.

The job takes more than a hundred volunteers, hundreds of man-hours and lots of patience. It has consumed so much of the 35-year-old woman's time since she started coordinating the event in 1989 that she begins working on the restart every year just after Christmas and takes a one-week vacation from work right before the race to make sure things go smoothly.

"It's hard," she said. "But once I got the Iditarod in my blood I couldn't say no."

Grizzle, an airplane mechanic by trade, got involved in the event several years ago as a volunteer.

That was after she fell in love with dog racing in Washington state when some friends invited her to come along on a dog sled trip.

"They invited me out one time to go mushing," she said. "I mean that was for me."

When she moved to Alaska in 1982 she had two things on her mind.

"I had two intentions," she said. "One of them was airplanes and the other was mushing. Both of them have paid off."

Grizzle began volunteering on the Iditarod restart then took over as coordinator when the former coordinator stepped down.

"I just went in and told them I was really interested," she said. "I talked to them and they said all right.



COLLEEN KELLY/Frontiersman

Julie Grizzle, holding her dog Vaughan, has put the pieces together for six smooth Iditarod Race restarts.

Her job and the jobs of the volunteers encompass just about everything.

"I have them do everything from actually setting up the course to being dog handlers and sled holders," she said. "They do security. They do crowd control. There are trail guards. You name it. We do just about everything."

Of all the years she's coordinated the restart, the first with her at the helm, in 1989, is the one she'd rather forget.

"There were real high winds," she said. "It took the snow to a sheet of ice. The porta-potties fell over. I fell a couple

of times."

The best was last year.

"It just seemed like everything clicked," she said. "Everything seemed to work out very good. It just seemed like it came off very well."

Though she doesn't want to make any predictions, she thinks this year, with a severe lack of snow, could be challenging.

"We'll get them off," she said. "That's not the problem. But it just depends upon how much hair-pulling and headache goes with it. That's my biggest concern right now...just getting snow."