

IN THE CLASSROOM

Farmers Branch students follow Alaskan dog race

By ROSEMARY MARTINEZ

Contributor

As the 39th Annual Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race geared up in Anchorage, Alaska, students at Mary Immaculate Catholic School in Farmers Branch also prepared for the race.

The third-grade teachers used the race, which began March 3, as a two week cross-curricular project for their students. In late February, the students each selected a musher (human race participant) from a list of more than 60 competitors. They champion and track these mushers and their teams of dogs as the teams travel through more than 1,000 miles of frozen terrain from Anchorage to Nome, Alaska.

"The Iditarod has given our students the opportunity to experience 'The Last Great Race on Earth,'" said third-grade teacher Eileen Blair. "It is a race in which unique men and women, along with their courageous dog teams, compete against nature in the wilds of Alaska. We begin by asking the children if they are interested in dogs, snow and adventure. Their resounding response is 'Yes!' — and we are off."

As the mushers are challenged in their race, the students are challenged in their classrooms through exercises that enhance skills in math, science, geography, history,



Photos submitted by ROSEMARY MARTINEZ

computer science and writing. Each day of the race, the students compute how fast teams are traveling, the distance between teams and checkpoints, and the current temperature. They send multiple emails to their mushers, encouraging them on through the arduous competition.

"The mushers have to have a relationship with their dogs; they have to really care about the dogs," said third-grader Zach Thibodeaux of Lewisville. "Someone who does not like dogs would really have a lot of trou-

ble during the race."

The students are also learning beyond the academic subjects as the lead canine reporter of the Iditarod, Zuma, encourages character and life skills through online training.

"The mushers are brave because they are heading out into the wilderness," said third-grader Joshua Montemayor of Carrollton. "They have to take care of their dogs."

This is the 10th year the third-grade teachers have presented the Iditarod pro-



Above: Third grade students Nicholas Egizio of The Colony (from left), Michael Hamilton of Flower Mound and Rachel Zang of Carrollton design their project folders for the Iditarod program. **Left:** Third-grade teacher Eileen Blair reads the history of the Iditarod to her class as they design their project folders.

gram to their students.

"Many students share their excitement with older siblings who still remember their own third-grade mushers," Blair said. "The race truly captures the spirit of adventure and excellence, and this program brings it into the classroom."

Rosemary Martinez contributes to neighborsgo on behalf of Mary Immaculate Catholic School.

TEXAS NATIONAL GEOGRAPHY BEE

Matthew Griffin invited to statewide competition

By ROSEMARY MARTINEZ

Contributor

Matthew Griffin of Farmers Branch, a seventh-grader at Mary Immaculate Catholic School, has been named a semifinalist eligible to compete in the Texas National Geography Bee.

As the overall geography bee winner for Mary Immaculate Catholic School, Matthew is one of only 100 intermediate to middle school students in the state who, after passing a qualifying test, has been invited to compete at this level.



Matthew Griffin

The 2012 Texas National Geography Bee, which is sponsored by the National Geographic Society, will be held March 30 in Bedford. The winner of this state competition will receive \$100, the "Complete National Geographic on DVD" and a trip to Washington, D.C., where he or she will represent Texas in the National Finals in May.

Matthew said he is excited about the opportunity.

"Finally, all this useless information that rattles around in my head is worth something," he said.

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MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Warming hearts



Photo submitted by CHRISTOPHER WOODS

About 170 women from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints gathered Feb. 25 at the church, 4000 Nazarene Road in Carrollton, to make projects for children at Texas Scottish Rite Hospital for Children and Children's Medical Center of Dallas. They represented congregations that meet in Carrollton, Coppell and Farmers Branch. The group created more than 500 small activity books, 175 socks for tots and 550 cards of encouragement for children. Approximately 150 blankets were donated. The women also collected snacks and microwavable foods to be used for parents of children in the ICU. Pictured are Tracy Chambers (left), who made and donated a quilt, and Leslie Owen, Relief Society president for the LDS Carrollton Stake.