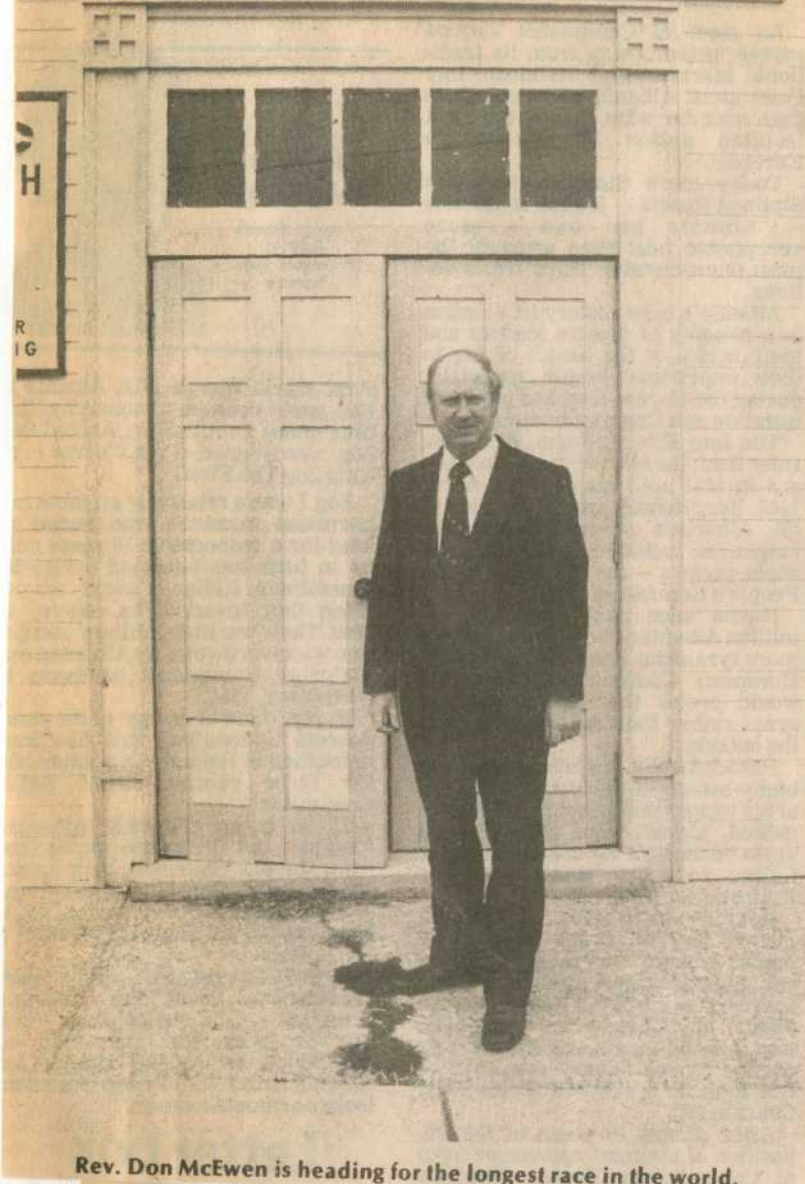


McEWEN, Don

MADOC BAPTIST CHURCH



Rev. Don McEwen is heading for the longest race in the world.

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Mushing minister heading to Alaska

By George White

MADOC—Don McEwen of Eldorado is a Baptist minister, sheep farmer, heavy-duty construction equipment operator and sled-dog racer. And he is in the Guinness Book of Records for driving the largest number of dogs pulling a single sled at one time.

He is also the only Canadian entered in the world's longest sled-dog race from Anchorage to Nome to be held next March in Alaska and to this end, has started on a four-month training session in preparation for the big event.

The race, known as the Iditarod, is a gruelling test of courage and endurance for drivers and dogs alike. Those taking part in this event face

temperatures of 40 to 50 degrees below zero, blizzards, unmarked trails, wild animals (moose in particular take exception to the dogs and attack them), accidents, loss of sleep and hallucinations.

For Rev. McEwen, the next four months will consist of tending to a pack of sled dogs, all day long for seven days a week. This long training session is necessary as McEwen will not be using his own dogs for the race.

Driving in the Iditarod has been a lifelong ambition for McEwen, but because of the high costs involved, it was an ambition that was likely to remain a dream. Last year, he decided to at least see the race first hand and on his visit to Alaska for the race, he met 78-year-old Earl Norris.

Norris owned a number of sled dogs and had driven in the Iditarod. He was keen to enter the race again but Mrs. Norris had other ideas and, as a result, Rev. McEwen was offered the opportunity to race Norris' dogs in the 1990 race.

Having access to a dog team already in Alaska cuts down on the costs involved in taking part in the Iditarod, but it still is a very expensive proposition. The entry fee is \$1,500 (U.S.) plus the cost of transportation to the race site, food, equipment and a myriad of other items necessary to sustain the team on what could be a 12-to-20-day race over 1,100 miles.

Sponsorship is the name of the game at the Iditarod. One lady driver, Susan Butcher, has won the race twice and her sponsorships total about \$130,000. Rev. McEwen is trying to do it on a bare bones budget of \$25,000 and he needs help.

He has paid his entry fee, made arrangements for a minister to look after his congregation, and has the support of his family who will be tending the sheep farming operation while he is in Alaska.

The McEwens have approached at least one potential sponsor, a dog food manufacturer, but as yet have had no response. However, he is optimistic and has faith that he will have enough backing for him to answer the starter's pistol next March.

Before leaving for Alaska, Rev. McEwen said, "Sled dog racing is increasing in popularity as a spectator sport and the costs of maintaining the dogs year round as well as racing costs are increasing all the time. We (the drivers) have formed the Ontario Sled Dog Association because we felt that if we did not have a strong organization behind us, sled-dog racing as we know it today, will collapse."

Rev. McEwen is determined to take part in the Iditarod and is equally determined to carry the Canadian Maple Leaf on his travels.

The Ontario Sled Dog Association will be seeking sponsors for Rev. McEwen and other events and can be contacted through George Pierce, secretary, Box 147, Sharbot Lake, Ont., K0H 2P0