

## Major events, major sponsors, major growing pains

by Teresa Earle

The crisp, sunny days of late winter attract adventure-seeking visitors to the Yukon. For many, the spectacle of the Yukon Quest International Sled Dog Race is a major draw. The 1600 km, 14-day event is an early example of the 'extreme racing' phenomenon that is now so popular around the world. Showcasing romantic and often harsh aspects of the Yukon lifestyle and environment, the event has become a cornerstone winter attraction in a suite of Yukon events that include *Sourdough Rendezvous*, the *Frostbite Music Festival*, *Trek over the Top* and *Thunder on Ice*.

Major events like Quest require strong partnerships to achieve their tourism potential. Throughout its 18 years, the Quest has enjoyed strong support from local sponsors such as NMI Mobility, Canadian Tire and the High Country Inn. However, the needs of a growing international race necessitated a bigger name with deeper pockets and a hunger for media coverage. In 1997 the Quest signed on with Fulda Reifen, a German multinational tire maker, for a sponsorship deal that would provide much needed cash and profile to the event. The deal was terminated after just two years, and for the 2000 race, the Quest board signed a short-lived contract with Kaufman Footwear, the maker of Sorel winter boots.

### BRANDING IMPORTANT TO PARTNERS

"The Yukon brand stands for so much – pure, strength, outdoors, rugged – it has become very attractive to corporations that seek to associate themselves with these characteristics," says Rod Raycroft, Manager of Mass Communications for Tourism Yukon. "Starbucks has a Yukon coffee, there's a Yukon fleece outerwear company – the Yukon Quest is very marketable as an icon of Yukon values."

The Quest organization knows this – they bank on the event's appeal to draw corporate sponsorship. This is an expensive race to run – not so much from an operational standpoint, but mainly because the size of the purse is what draws world-class contenders from North America and increasingly from overseas.

Fulda already had strong ties to the Yukon government's tourism branch. With winter tourism and incentive travel starting to take off

in the Yukon, the dynamic between government, Fulda and the non-profit Quest became complicated when the Fulda-Quest relationship eroded.

"As a board, we were naive," says Anne Tayler, a past board member and wife of renowned Yukon musher Frank Turner. "We were relatively new to this kind of deal. And then it felt like it was our responsibility to keep Fulda and their incentive program in the Yukon, even though the board concluded that the relationship wasn't working for the Quest."

### LEGAL ADVICE ESSENTIAL

For the Quest's volunteer board, dealing with 'major league' corporate sponsors has been an educational process. Tayler acknowledges that homegrown events like the Quest often don't have the know-how or corporate savvy that is required. She sums up some key points for



the benefit of other organizations facing similar challenges.

"It's most critical to match the sponsor with the event. Your philosophy, goals and operational style must be compatible. Our eyes weren't open with regard to things like selling Quest product. We were a cash-rop organization, and the tendency when you are broke is to respond to a deal like you are in heaven." They also didn't factor in sponsor maintenance or agent fees. "You should set aside at least 20 – 30 per cent of the cash to service the sponsor, pay the agent and cover any related costs."

David Porter concurs. He is past-president of the Canadian Quest board, and is quick to point out the extent of the learning curve this organization has overcome to get where it is today. "My advice to other sponsor-seeking boards: take a lawyer with you. We didn't know

enough about the process, we were too trusting, and we didn't read between the lines."

The sponsorship deal with Canadian bootmaker, Sorel, did seem like a match made in heaven. However, Sorel was also a company with an uncertain future, and its financial problems led to premature termination of its deal with the Quest.

Given the lessons of the past few years, the Quest board rallied quickly and has been in discussions with a prospective major Canadian sponsor for several months now. The board had engaged the services of a consultant in recent years, but the current prospect actually approached the Quest. Another sign of the maturing of the Quest organization is the professional sponsorship package they have developed.

### ONLY PROMISE WHAT YOU CAN DELIVER

Other lessons along the way have included gaining media awareness and knowing the organization's capabilities. As Porter noted, in the heat of the moment it can be easy to promise someone the world to get to where you want to be. He emphasized the importance of only promising what you can deliver. "We have become acutely aware of watching

The 2001 Yukon Quest is scheduled to start on February 11<sup>th</sup> in Whitehorse and it usually takes the winner between 10 and 12 days to cross the more than 1,000 miles of harsh terrain to reach the finish line in Fairbanks on the Chena River at the Cushman Street Bridge in Fairbanks, Alaska.

Upon leaving the starting line, mushers travel through checkpoints at Braeburn Lodge, Carmacks and Pelly Crossing before reaching the midway point at Dawson City, where they are required to take a 36-hour layover. After leaving Dawson, mushers cross into Alaska and go through a number of checkpoints before reaching the finish line in Fairbanks.

[www.yukonquest.yk.ca/](http://www.yukonquest.yk.ca/)

this classic Yukon event is finding its way into the spotlight.

*Teresa Earle is a writer in the Yukon and a contributor to Communiqué*

## Spa products add to tourism economic impacts

by Brenda Watts

Refreshing relaxation, soothing surroundings, and invigorating landscapes are only a few unique selling points for the Canadian spa experience. Complementing the Canadian spa experience are the truly unique healing spa product lines available on the international market in which Canadian businesses are now entering.

To begin with, there are the ancient spa salts from Saskatchewan that are being mined, bottled, and sold by the Canadian company *Pinnacle Minerals* in Saskatoon. These special sea salt crystals are from ancient sea water that has been untouched for millions of years. The salt crystals are being extracted from 3,000 feet beneath Saskatchewan's Great Plains for their natural healing properties. *Pinnacle Minerals* have been marketing their Canadian spa salts internationally for over 2 years, and can boast at being as good as any other spa-salts in the world for exfoliating!

Malcolm Leggett at *Pinnacle Minerals* comments, "We've been taking our salts to the international markets fully believing that our Saskatchewan minerals are equal to, or superior than, any of our competition in all parts of the world. The biggest challenge is to get the word out to the spa owners and operators, and that is what we are focused on!"

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