

# CARVER COUNTY GOLD MINER



Saturday, March 3, 2012

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**SATURDAY**  
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## Around Town

The Waconia Moravian Church (209 E 2nd Street) is hosting its 17th annual Alligator Gumbo from 4:30 to 7 p.m. on Sunday, March 4. This annual fundraiser features spicy gumbo made from scratch with real alligator meat. For the not so adventurous, homemade chicken noodle soup and chicken gumbo will also be served. All welcome - the cost is a free will donation.



## Around Town

A pancake breakfast and auction fundraiser will be held at Zion Lutheran Church in Cologne on Sunday, March 4. The silent auction runs from 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and a live auction starts at 11 a.m. Tickets: \$7, kids 5 and under are free.



Dog sledding is more than just going on a ride — it's an unforgettable educational experience. Linda Newman, above left, is the owner of Points Unknown, a Watertown-based company that offers Dog sledding adventures. Submitted Photos

# Mushing toward 'Points Unknown'

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FRIDAY SATURDAY SUNDAY

# Mushing toward 'Points Unknown'

**By Paul Downer**  
Staff Writer

It might be easy for those living near the Twin Cities metropolitan area to imagine that dog sledding is a thing of the past, or is at most confined to remote areas of the far north like Alaska or the Yukon.

Surely modern machines like snowmobiles and four-wheelers have made dogsleds obsolete in the 21st century, right?

Think again. Dog sledding is actually alive and well in Carver

County, and area residents can learn about the activity firsthand during a family day event at Baylor Park on Saturday, March 17. During the day, the dogs and staff of Points Unknown, a dog sledding adventures company based out of Watertown, will offer a program in conjunction with the Carver County Historical Society.

Those who come out for the event will have the opportunity to meet the dog teams, hear about how the dogs are trained, see them harnessed and pulling a

sled (a wheeled sled if snow conditions are poor), and learn the history of the company. The event runs from 1-4 p.m. and the cost for members of the historical society is \$7.50 per adult and \$5 per child, and \$9 for non-member adults and \$6 for their children. There is a limit of 50 individuals for the program.

Pre-registration is required by contacting Heidi Gould of the Carver County Historical Society at (952) 442-4234 or [hgould@co.carver.mn.us](mailto:hgould@co.carver.mn.us).

## Points Unknown

Dog sledding has allowed Linda Newman, owner of Points Unknown, to combine two great passions in life — working with dogs and the being in the wilderness.

"I grew up in a Forest Service family, so we lived all over the United States in the woods, basically," she said. She began handling sled dogs, or mushing, around the year 2000, and started her company five years later.

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# Sledding is more than just a ride

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"About 2005 I decided it was about time that I started doing what I wanted to do versus what I thought I should do. So I cut back on some of my career-related items and I decided that the dogs were going to pay for themselves," Newman said.

Points Unknown became self-supporting after doing daily work at the Gunflint Lodge north of Grand Marais running a dog mushing adventure business from 2007 to 2009, but Newman eventually realized that wasn't quite what she wanted either.

"We got too big and I wasn't enjoying it as much. It seemed like everyone else was spending more time with my dogs than I was. The reason I started the company was to spend more time with my dogs, so we cut way back and it's just a piece of the puzzle now," she said.

Today, she has resumed some of her real estate appraising work, which she previously did for about 20 years, and also makes beeswax candles that she sells all around the country. But the dominant feature of life continues to be her dogs.

"It's a total lifestyle because you can't just decide to go away for a week. Either all the dogs are going with you or you have to find somebody really responsible to stay with them," she said. "We get up in the morning and the dogs are first, then we do whatever we have to do during the day. If the dogs aren't running during the day they're rotating in the back yard playing in groups, so we're out every hour swapping dogs."

Newman is aided in her Points Unknown work by her husband, Neil Slaughter, and 18-year-old Kristen Eckwright from Glencoe. They help care for the company's stable of 20 sled dogs, most of which are Hedlund Huskies, along with two "mascot" dogs.

As for training, the dogs begin wearing harnesses while still puppies to get used to the feeling, and begin pulling the 50-pound sleds with a team at about 1 year old.

"We literally just have to harness their instinct," said Newman, adding that Huskies can be stubborn unless

their trainer earns their respect. "People think they have to be the Alpha of their dog or their pack. Well, you really can't be that because you're not a dog. I just consider myself a manager."

## Adventures

In recent years, Points Unknown has taken regular trips up north to its property along the Arrowhead Trail, where it holds beginner and advanced adventure courses. Beginners learn how to handle a team of six dogs (sled teams can range from 3 to 12 dogs depending on the load and conditions). Advanced mushers might make a six-mile run into a remote cabin without utilities and stay there for several days, making runs of anywhere from 2 to 18 miles.

In fact, at the time of this interview the company had just returned from a 3.5-week stint up north, and it took part in the Department of Natural Resources' BOW (Becoming Outdoors Women) program last weekend for a seventh consecutive year.

But the company's activities are not limited to events at faraway locations. Points Unknown also runs adventures out of its Watertown location, bringing guests who come in from around the country on adventures around Oak Lake. This year's winter, however, has been difficult for the company due to minimal snow.

"In December and January we were turning down adventure requests daily from people coming up to the Mayo Clinic from the south or some coming through Chicago. They wanted to do something with us and we had to keep saying no. That was really difficult because the dogs cost an awful lot to keep going," said Newman. "Last winter was really good."

At all times during the adventure days, the guests are invited to be active participants.

"We do an experience, so you get hands-on experience, how to harness and interact with the dogs, the different components of the sled, and so on," Newman said. "It's all educational, it's not just a ride."

• For more information on Points Unknown, see the company's website at [www.points-unknown.com](http://www.points-unknown.com).