

## Nice Article About Mush for a Cure

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The University of Minnesota included this in a recent news brief. Thanks for sharing our story!

## Mushing for a cause

Of dogs and men&hellip;and women

By Adam Overland

March 2, 2010

Big, burly lumberjacks in pink boas and bras riding behind dogs for a good cause. That sentence might be a little misleading, but it has an undeniable rhythm and all the ingredients of an attention grabber to keep you reading. Still, this strange scenario does indeed cook itself up for a good cause in the cold north once a year, and senior analyst and programmer in the College of Veterinary Medicine Ricq Pattay makes sure he's along for the ride.

Pattay spends much of his time writing web-based software for VetMed, but he also races sled dogs. This year, for the second time, he'll participate in the annual Mush for a Cure charitable event to benefit the National Breast Cancer Foundation. It's a non-competitive 21-mile event on the Gunflint Trail, far to the north. "It's so cool," says Pattay. "It's almost Canada&hellip;you feel out there&hellip;it's just you, the dogs, the trail,

and the sky," he says. Oh, and some "guys that look like lumberjacks dressed up in hot pink headdresses and wearing pink bras." It's quite a different view than what he sees from his cubicle.

~~No winter, no fun.~~

In 2000, after having lived in North Carolina for the previous 11 years, Pattay decided to make a move to Minnesota. He had a dog with him--a Samoyed, sometimes called the smiling dog (for obvious reasons when you see the happy looking hounds).

"You're going to laugh, but I moved to Minnesota for the climate; winter is my favorite season," says Pattay. He says he was fortunate to be hired at the U within a couple of months. "I embraced the job with open arms because it combined two of my biggest loves--doing something to help animals, and having some talent and skill in computer programming."

With his footing established, he set out to pursue an interest that began with his Samoyed. Shortly after arriving in Minnesota, he joined a local Samoyed club in Saint Paul, and found events like a mushing boot camp run by two skilled women mushers in Togo, MN. But, he says, mushing boot camp isn't necessarily for the dogs.

"It's more training of the human being than it is the dogs. The dogs have the instinct to run--you just have to focus them," says Pattay.

Pattay guides the dogs with various commands once used for plow animals, like "hike" (go), "haw" (left), "gee" (right), and "on by" (as in, "don't chase that squirrel--go on by").

This year, Pattay is running a three-Samoyed team made up of Forest, a 3-year-old male; Mystic, a 4-year-old female; and Dia, a 2-year-old female. Reindeer herders once used these fluffy, white dogs to help with herding and sled pulling, as well as snuggling up to for warmth at night. Samoyeds have a lot of energy and get frustrated without daily exercise. Pattay says there is a saying in dog-mushing:

"You can't push a rope. They have to want to do it instinctively, or they don't," he says.

Indeed, his dogs seem hardly able to contain themselves before the start of the race, but they quickly settle down to an even pace. You can [join Pattay and his dogs for a virtual POV ride here](#), during a video practice run.

You might not guess it by watching the video, but his dogs aren't that fast. He's used to being passed by other teams, but winning the race isn't really why he's there anyway. "If I can be out there in my favorite season of the year, with some of my favorite creatures on this planet, doing what they love, doing what I love, and doing it for charity--this is my idea of perfection. It's awesome."

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If you would like to make a pledge on Ricq Pattay's behalf, email [Ricq Pattay](#).

The annual [Mush For a Cure](#) on the Gunflint Trail north of Grand Marais, Minn., takes place March 12-13.