

## CHIDITAROD



The [Chiditarod](#) is an urban Iditarod modeled on similar events in San Francisco and New York City. The Chicago version has some unique features. It is a food drive, with participants expected to reach the finish line with carts full of food. This food is donated to local pantries.



Founder [Devin Breen](#) chose Burners Without Borders to locate appropriate recipients of the food, and BWB took full advantage of the opportunity for gifting. Alderman Michelle Harris (8<sup>th</sup>) was approached with an inquiry about a worthy church pantry. She nominated two churches in her ward. Another church was provided by the Water Commissioner of Chicago. By turning to community leaders, BWB was able to help them contribute to a good work, and to strengthen friendships. We were also able to ensure that the pantries involved were well established and prepared to make best use of donated food.



**This year, we have our urban Iditarod starting at a location where small businesses are nervous because we are putting in a new water main. We are working with the Chamber of Commerce to create a huge circus atmosphere right at the work site to gather a nice crowd. Environmental Encroachment, lots of costumes, etc. The merchants, in return for our commotion, will collect food for two weeks as part of the food drive which is the essence of the Chiditarod. We are being careful to forge relationships and carry this out in a manner that preserves its underground identity and avoids commodification... but does not shy away from engagement. The alderman loves it. The chamber is also coming up with prizes for the racers, and BWB will be the broker of the food for south side pantries. The chamber is also taking care of insurance. All of this probably means we don't need to worry about permits, because no cop in his right mind busts a food drive being cheered by the chamber and the alderman.**

#### **A FEW LESSONS LEARNED:**

- **Police love patches. They trade embroidered patches at their meetings and keep collections of other departments' patches. We embroidered some patches for Chiditarod, and used them to open conversations with approaching police. It was a home run every time, and we all got along just fine.**
- **Carefully instruct all racers to obey all laws. Then (when the race begins) look south while the racers head north (or vice-versa).**
- **Turn what you are doing into a food drive and you place your event above possible criticism.**

- **Keep a sense of humor and perspective. Laughing neighbors seldom call the police.**
- **It takes very little to bring out the best in people. Be ready to accept and channel their generosity (e.g. three pallets of food from Whole Foods).**
- **Make sure people get credit for the good things they do.**
- **Start races with really fresh Italian Sausages for everyone. This may give Vegans an unexpected advantage, since they will run faster from the starting point than they otherwise might.**
- **Do not fill the finish line bar to capacity while the judges are still outside picking winners, or they might not be let in to make their announcement. A Twenty Dollar bill can be helpful if a problem develops along these lines.**