A dogsled stood on the Windsor Auditorium stage Sept. 6 as Josh Brindle gave an update about plans for The IronLine sled dog race, planned for Iron River on Jan. 18 to 20.

IRON RIVER—Plans for Iron County's first-ever sled dog race are moving ahead, organizers said during a meeting last week.

What's needed now are sponsors, money and help from volunteers.

John Brindle, one of the organizers, reviewed the progress so far during a meeting at the Windsor Auditorium Sept. 6.

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The race is called The IronLine, and it will consist of a pair of two-stage races. It will take place over the weekend of Jan. 18 to 20. The races will start and end on Genesee Street in downtown Iron River.

Two races are planned: a 45-mile race for six-dog teams and a 90-mile race for 10-dog teams. Both races will be in two stages—the teams will race for a while, take a long break and then finish the distance.

Brindle, who runs the He Brews coffee shop in Iron River, said he got the idea for the event after watching the Iditarod in Alaska early this year. He has been consulting closely with officials involved with the Copperdog 150, a sled dog race based in Calumet, as he made plans for The IronLine—getting ideas, finding out how they did things.

"They're an incredibly professional bunch," he said. "They do a great job with it." The Copperdog race drew about 4,000 people to downtown Calumet last year.

The concept of the race that stuck home with him, Brindle said, is "community vitality." Brindle and his wife have been involved with Community Concepts, the Rum Rebellion and other parades and events in the Iron River area.

"We want to see something happen that can that can add some life and community vitality and really bring some fun to the community," he told the group.

"And racing dogs in the middle of the night in January down Genesee Street, watching the excitement of all that … "

There would be other events beside the races: meeting the mushers, meeting the dogs, rides on dog sleds for the kids.

"People like dogs: bottom line."

A mushers village would be organized at the RV park, where vendors could set up along with artists, taxidermists, hot food vendors, wood carvers and others. Think of Klondike Days in Eagle River. Spectators would be welcomed in to meet the mushers and the dogs.

Brindle said the "main heart" for doing this "is for the benefit of Iron River and Iron County itself."

"That's the idea. I think there are dozens and dozens of ways that this kind of thing helps out a community like ours." Plus, it would be a good reason to break out of the winter doldrums in mid January."

What would The IronLine be like? The races would start and end downtown. Genesee Street would be closed for the event—Brindle is working with city officials about the logistics. Snow would be trucked in for the course, with snow fence running parallel to the course.

The logos of sponsors would appear on banners along the course, on the sides of the sleds and on bibs the mushers wear—there may be an overhead banner as well. Noisemakers. A sound system making announcements. People cheering. Dogs barking.

Planning the course is not complete. The DNR's recreation trail through the area can't be used, but the Apple Blossom trail may be used along with existing snowmobile trails around the area and even closed, unplowed roads in midwinter. The race could be run on property near the George Young complex on Chicaugon Lake. There will be road crossings where spectators can watch the dogsleds from their cars.

Other events related to The IronLine race would all be centered on Iron River, keeping spectators, mushers and their teams near downtown restaurants and businesses. A folk and blues concert is one of the events being considered. Maybe a "fat bike" race.

Brindle said organizers are looking for about $20,000 in cash and "in-kind" support. The funds would be needed for prize money and to take care of expenses.

Some of that expense can be done by "in-kind" work: people donating their efforts to do things like trucking snow around or preparing trails.

Beyond that, many volunteers will be needed to work in a number of areas: registration, dog handlers, coordinators, safety teams. "It's going to take a lot of people to get excited for this race."

Brindle said he plans to do presentations for school and county groups

Dennis Phillips, the trail boss for the race who has experience with the race at Tomahawk, Wis., told the group, "If you get involved, especially as a volunteer, you will be glad that you did."

He spoke about ideas for the course and the set-up work needed for the downtown area, where the races start and end. He reminded his audience: "Anything that brings in money from somewhere else benefits everybody."

Phillips said each musher can spend about $1,000 when they are visiting for a race. "They are dead serious racers" who bring many dogs to town for a race.

More information about the event is available at the groups's website, theironline.com.