

Greyhound racing opponents gather at Bonita Springs track to protest

By JOHN OSBORNE
Saturday, April 4, 2009

BONITA SPRINGS — Holding signs proclaiming such messages as “Greyhound Racing Kills” and “You Bet, They Die,” about 40 members of the GREY2K USA greyhound advocacy group gathered to protest operations at the Naples-Fort Myers Greyhound Track in Bonita Springs on Saturday.

Florida Gulf Coast University senior Ashley Carver, vice president of an animal-rights group at the university, said the reason for her participation was simple.

“I’m against racing because the truth is that it’s torture,” Carver said above the honking of horns as many drivers whizzed past on Bonita Beach Road, beeping their support. “So many of them are hurt and killed and most don’t get adopted.”

Wearing a pair of dark sunglasses against the bright sunlight overhead, Karla Gibbons of Naples said she was attempting to do her part to end greyhound racing.

“I’m a dog lover and an activist, and (greyhound racing) is a dying sport,” she said. “It’s on its way out, and I’m just nudging it along.”

Rich Lewis of Naples warned members of the media that officials at the Naples-Fort Myers Greyhound Track wouldn’t be receptive to inquiries concerning the treatment of racing dogs.

“If they let (the media) in there to tape the conditions of the dogs in the kennel, I’ll eat this sign,” Lewis said. “I’ve been to tracks all over Florida, and they’re disgusting. The smell alone would knock you over.”

A short time later, media members were turned back at the track as they sought comments responding to the protest.

“No comment,” an official said. “We have no spokesperson here, and you can’t interview anyone on our property.”

Decked out in a pink T-shirt featuring a depiction of an emancipated greyhound reading, “Once I ran lightning fast/Now I’m free ... Free at last,” Dana Thimons has adopted two retired greyhound racers.

“They’re such sweet dogs, and they’re really great with kids,” Thimons said.

April Hoover of Bonita Springs said greyhounds often are forced to live in a cramped environment for most of their lives.

“They spend 18 to 22 hours in (their cages) every day, and they’re fed (meat) that’s been rejected by the USDA,” Hoover said. “Eighty percent of (the dogs) are euthanized, and the bottom line is that it’s all about money.”

GREY2K USA organizer Chuck Danielian of North Naples said he wasn’t surprised track officials didn’t respond to tell their side of the story.

“There’s a lot of stuff they don’t want you to know,” Danielian said. “They don’t want you to know how the dogs are treated and how they’re confined to their cages 20 to 22 hours a day, and they don’t want you to know about the ... meat they’re fed.”

GREY2K USA member Ken Pelton traveled from the east coast of Florida with his wife, Kathy, to attend Saturday’s protest.

Any time animals are used for entertainment, they usually come out on the wrong side of the stick,” Pelton said. “I’m against animals in the entertainment business in general because of the injuries and unnecessary deaths they incur.”

* * * * *

For more information about GREY2K USA, call 317.666.3526, or visit www.GREY2KUSA.org.

* * * * *