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News

A race to save animals

BY JIM HAND SUN CHRONICLE STAFF

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MANSFIELD - When Debbie Jordan was a librarian at Mansfield High School, she started a student humane society to help animals.

She and the students raised funds and awareness while helping out at the town animal shelter.

In the course of her activities, she became more aware of the plight of greyhound dogs that are raced at tracks in Massachusetts and elsewhere.

She said she was told the dogs are kept in small cages most of the day and have a high rate of injuries from racing. Now she is helping to lead a drive to phase out greyhound racing in Massachusetts by 2010.

The movement announced Tuesday that it has collected 100,000 signatures on petitions to get the issue on the ballot for the state election next year. A similar referendum in 2000 failed, but Jordan said she is optimistic it will pass this time.

She said there is more awareness of the issue and the new referendum is more narrowly focused. It also phases out racing, rather than trying to end it immediately.

Jordan's role in the movement has been to collect signatures and talk to people about the issue.

Sometimes she brings a greyhound with her while collecting signatures so people can see how loving and gentle they are.

Anne Albanese of Taunton is the Bristol County coordinator for the petition drive.

She said the county is a little less sympathetic to the cause than the rest of the state because of the presence of a greyhound track in Raynham. Many residents of Bristol County either know someone who works there, is related to an employee or frequents the track, she said.

Tuesday, Albanese was making the rounds in her territory, delivering petitions to town hall in places like Mansfield and Norton.

The owner of two adopted greyhounds, she also said she is concerned about the confinement of the dogs at the tracks and the injuries.

The Committee to Protect Dogs estimates that 700 greyhounds have been injured at Massachusetts tracks over the past five years.

A spokesman for the Greyhound Racing Association of America could not be reached for comment.

However, the association's Web site offers an fact sheet that it said refutes the claims of critics.

The association contends:

Greyhounds love to race and chase by instinct.

The prevention of injuries is a top priority of the industry, and it funds research into veterinary issues.

Greyhounds are kept in kennels and are allowed out for light exercise several times a day.

Ninety percent of retired greyhounds are adopted.