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HOLLYWOOD

Hollywood group works to save greyhounds

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GREYHOUND ADOPTION

What: Hollydogs Greyhound Adoption

Where: 1600 S. Dixie Hwy., Hollywood

Information: 954-925-7758, www.hollydogs.org.


BY EILEEN SOLER
SPECIAL TO THE MIAMI HERALD

Former Greyhound racers and their humans raised their voices in a communal howl at Hollywood Greyhound Adoption organization's annual Walk for the Greyhounds on Hollywood Beach. Sustained "roos" came from the chorus of nearly 100 four-footed and two-footed friends to bring awareness to the adoption agency and the plight of the racer dogs.

"Yes, they sing," said Linda Howard, flanked by her "boy" Mantovani, 7, and "girl" Aida, 9.

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But most Greyhounds never get the chance to sing. Silvana Cortella, who operates the rescue program and Hollydogs Inn - Pet Hotel in Hollywood with her husband Sergio, said only about 30 percent of retired racers find happy homes. The other 70 percent are euthanized or are killed because they are injured, sick or are no longer profitable.

Howard, a professor of education at Nova Southeastern University, said Aida was rescued along with other Greyhounds from a "kill truck" that was headed to a place used to put the dogs down. "It breaks my heart . . . if they don't place in three races in a row, they are no longer of monetary value," Howard said.

Hollydogs, created in 1994, finds local homes for 150 retired and rescued racers every year and transports another 100 to Philadelphia, where adoption advocates find additional homes. Others live at the agency's five-acre Greyhound sanctuary in Bonita Springs.

The 12th annual walk, held Nov. 13 at Hollywood Beach Cultural Center, included classical music by the Florida Youth Orchestra, organic doggie treats and a vegetarian buffet "in honor of all animals," Cortella said. Also present were representatives of Grey2K USA, a national non-profit group dedicated to protecting racing dogs and eventually ending the sport.

"For many years we stayed politically correct so that we could rescue the animals and find them homes. Now we have the connections we need to do that and work to see legislation abolish Greyhound racing," Silvana Cortella said.

Seven states allow dog racing; Florida is one of them. According to www.grey2kusa.org, about 15,580 Greyhounds were bred for racing last year. Twenty-three race tracks put the dogs to work but because several states do not keep verifiable records, the group cannot confirm how many dogs are euthanized when they are no longer profitable. Estimates range up to 8,500 per year.

Dr. Michael Freimark, a pediatrician from Plantation who has adopted several retired Greyhounds, said Greyhounds start training at 6-months-old. Frequent injuries and slow speeds weed out the dogs. Many of those deemed “unprofitable” never make it to humane euthanasia. “It’s faster and cheaper for kennel owners to turn the dogs loose and kill them on the spot. It’s horrible,” Freimark said.

Last month, 32 greyhounds were found dead at a Panhandle greyhound race track. Starvation and dehydration were ruled as the cause of death.

Ronald Williams, the dogs’ trainer, was charged with 37 counts of felony animal cruelty – one for each dead dog, plus five counts for emaciated animals that were still alive, the Associated Press reported. The dogs were found dead at the Ebro Greyhound Park in north Florida.

Hollydogs has 20 Greyhounds available for adoption for a fee of \$200 each. The cost includes spay or neuter, dental care, shots, fecal tests, heartworm and disease checks, a collar and leash, grooming kit and ID tag.

Kathy Pelton, of Cooper City, who adopted Molly, 11, and became an activist for Grey2K USA, said she hopes 2011 brings change - especially no more Greyhound racing. “Let’s make this a good year for Greyhounds,” Pelton said.