

Greyhound rescuer teams with Baptists, Humane Society to fight dog racing in Alabama



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Christine Dorchak, president and general counsel of the greyhound rescue group Grey2K USA of Arlington, Mass., said she's teaming up with Baptists and the Humane Society in Alabama for a campaign to end dog racing in the state. (Photo by Greg Garrison/AL.com)

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Christine Dorchak, president and general counsel of the greyhound rescue group Grey2K USA of Arlington, Mass., said she's teaming up with Baptists and the Humane Society in Alabama for a campaign to end dog racing in the state.

"It's a business where dogs are injured and killed just so someone can place a \$2 bet on them," Dorchak said. "It's a very cruel industry."

Dorchak said that the Birmingham Race Course was inspected three times in 2013, according to Birmingham Racing Commission records, and dogs lived in "filthy, noxious, flea-infested" stacked cages. "The conditions in kennels were very poor," she said. "Nothing was done to improve the conditions of the dogs."

Mobile Greyhound Park is not required to do inspections, she said.

Since 2008, there have been 16 cases of racing greyhounds that tested positive for cocaine, including one in Birmingham and one in Mobile, Dorchak said. In Birmingham, the case resulted in a \$750 fine. In Mobile, the dog owner was fined \$50, she said.

"Because this is a dying industry, there's very little money to care for the dogs properly," Dorchak said. "A dog with a broken leg is probably a dead dog."

Dogs are frequently put down because of injuries or because they are not expected to be good racers, she said. They are fed a diet of "4-D meat," from dying, diseased, disabled and dead livestock that was deemed unfit for human consumption, Dorchak said.

That along with warehouse-style kennels leads to frequent health problems among dogs and more euthanasia, she said.

Dorchak said tracks are required to run live greyhounds as a condition for being permitted to have simulcast betting. She wants to change that so that tracks can drop live greyhound racing.

The Rev. Joe Godfrey, former president of the Alabama Baptist Convention and now executive director of the anti-gambling group Alabama Citizens Action Program, said Southern Baptists will support Dorchak's efforts to stop greyhound racing in Alabama.

"We don't want to see them gambling on anything," Godfrey said.

Grey2K has successfully lobbied against racing in other states including Massachusetts that have discontinued dog racing. Only seven states still have live greyhound racing, including Alabama and Florida. "We've helped close 28 dog tracks," Dorchak said.

"It's my goal to end dog racing in the United States," Dorchak said. "We consider it our job to end that suffering."

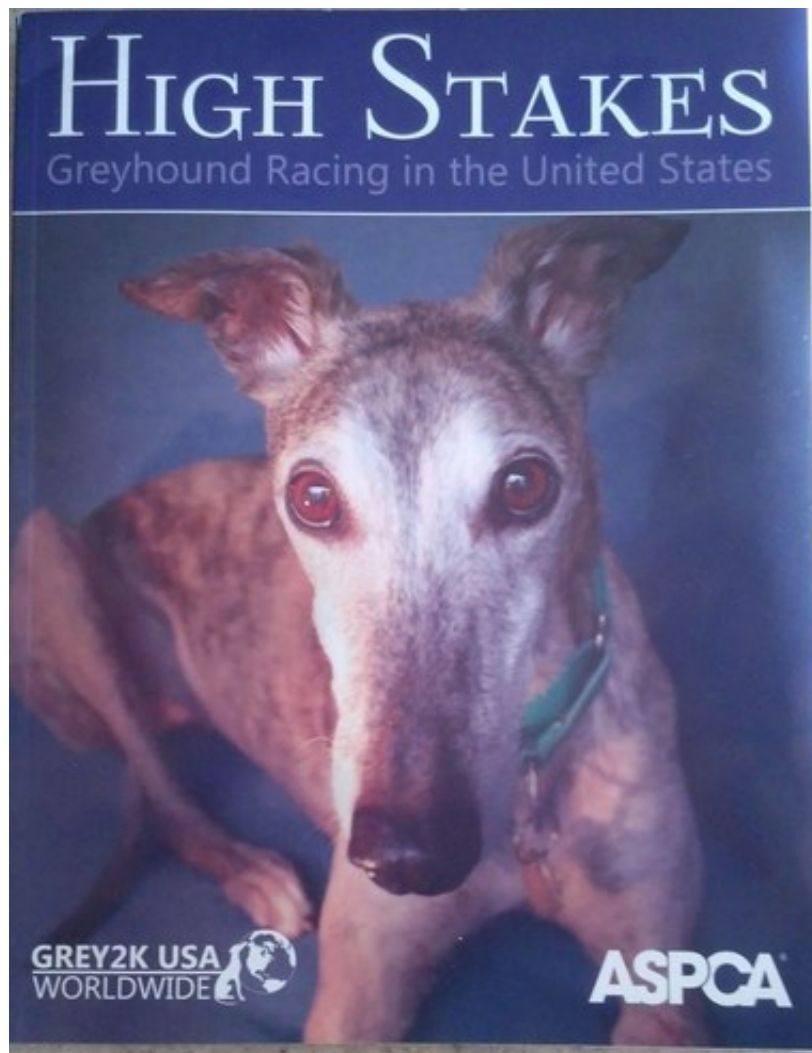
She has consulted with the Humane Society in Alabama and plans to work with its leaders.

"Dog racing is not what people think it is," said Mindy Gilbert, Alabama state director for the Humane Society of the United States. "It's a horrible and cruel practice fueled by gambling."

Dorchak said she has written legislation for other states that requires reporting about injuries to greyhounds and deaths during races. She'd like to find a legislative sponsor in Alabama, she said.

"The Humane Society would support that," Gilbert said. "Grey2K has been the leader nationally in bringing this issue forward and they've been very effective in other states."

Dorchak said she has sent copies of "High Stakes," her group's study of dog racing nationwide, to the state's legislators.



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Efforts to reach the general manager of the Birmingham Race Course and the executive director of the Birmingham Racing Commission for comment today were unsuccessful.

The Birmingham Race Course opened as a horse-racing facility called the Birmingham Turf Club in 1987. It went bankrupt in 1988 after a year when attendance was far below expectations.

Delaware North bought the track out of bankruptcy and it reopened in 1989 with horse racing, but closed again in 1991.

Milton McGregor, a dog track owner, bought the Birmingham Race Course in 1992 and reopened the facility with both horse and dog racing, but eventually dropped horse races altogether. Last year, the financially struggling Race Course asked for a bailout about \$800,000 from the Birmingham Racing Commission to pay three years of back property taxes. The money came from an escrow account previously set up from a percentage of wagers at the facility. The fund was created to ensure payouts for live horse racing if horses ever returned to the facility.