

## Council Bluffs dog racing crosses finish line today



Stuart Villanueva

In this Oct. 28, 2015 photo, three Greyhounds peek over a fence in their enclosure at Big Water Greyhound Farm where racing dogs are bred and raised in La Marque, Texas. (Stuart Villanueva/The Galveston County Daily News via AP)

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Dog racing in Council Bluffs will cross the finish line for good today.

Post time for this last day of racing is at 4 p.m. at Bluffs Run by Horseshoe Casino. It comes with little fanfare.

“We’re not having any special farewell,” said Bo Guidry, Horseshoe/Harrah’s senior vice president and general manager. “We’ll be done at 6:30 p.m.”

The pari-mutuel betting area will close for the last time at 7 p.m., he added. After today, Dubuque will be the only Iowa city to have dog racing.

Dog racing began in Council Bluffs in 1986 after Bluffs Run was built, but dog racing had been popular in the area long before then. While the track drew large crowds in its early years, interest in dog racing declined over the years, according to Guidry, and he and other casino officials sought to end it for good because of the lack of interest. It was only continued casino subsidies that kept Bluffs Run running.

They finally got their wish last year when final terms of an agreement between the state’s greyhound industry, Horseshoe Casino in Council Bluffs and Mystique Casino in Dubuque were approved.

Legislation to this effect was passed by the Legislature and signed by Gov. Terry Branstad on May 30, 2014.

Under the legislation, Horseshoe could end dog racing this December. However, the owners of Horseshoe Casino have to pay the Iowa Greyhound Association \$9.3 million a year for seven years to continue dog racing in Dubuque and to pay breeders, kennel operators and others whose livelihoods depend on greyhound racing in Iowa.

Some might think this final year of dog racing brought more people to the track to experience this form of gaming one last time, but that hasn't been the case, Guidry said.

"There's been no positive traction this year," he said. "It continues to decline."

He estimated that just 50 to 100 people would show up on any given weekday, slightly more on weekends. Guidry believed many attendees probably gambled on other races at the pari-mutuel area instead of gambling on the dogs.

Between eight and 10 people work full-time in running Bluffs Run, and Horseshoe Casino has offered them jobs elsewhere, he added.

The owners of the dogs have a month to wrap things up at Bluffs Run, Guidry said, as Horseshoe Casino has other plans for that ground.

"We continue to look for a partner to build a hotel there," he said. "I think that is the best use of that space."