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Millions spent on payments to WV greyhound breeders

by Joel Ebert, Federal Courts Reporter

The West Virginia Racing Commission gave more than \$10 million to individuals and businesses in the last two years through the state's Greyhound Breeding Development Fund, with more than half the money going to a small group, according to a public records request.

The finding comes after [Grey2K USA](#), an organization working to end greyhound racing nationwide, asked the state racing commission last month for a list of all individuals who have received money from the Greyhound Breeding and Development Fund since May 2013.

The racing commission provided documents that reveal the top five recipients and their breeding organizations have received nearly \$5 million in the last two years.

The top recipient was Patrick McMillon, owner of Alum Creek-based McMillon Kennel, who took in \$1.4 million.

During the same time period, Monroe Racing received \$1.2 million. According to records maintained by the West Virginia Secretary of State, Monroe Racing is owned by Rodney Monroe and Josh Braunlich, who are both based in Wheeling.

Among the remaining top five recipients of the Greyhound Breeding Development Fund in the last two years was Ricardo Pacheco, who received \$964,000, Greg Geter, who took in \$608,000, and Rondis Cavender and Cavender Greyhounds, which collected \$606,000.

In total, the top five recipients amassed \$4.89 million out of the total \$10.2 million doled out via the breeders fund in the last two years.

"This is a shameless money grab by a handful of powerful breeders," said Christine Dorchak, president of Grey2K.

Dorchak, who described the breeders fund as "part of the gravy train for a dying industry," said it is unnecessary. "Basically the state is making millionaires out of greyhound breeders," she said.

McMillon, however, disagrees with her assessment.

"No one is getting rich off it," he said.

McMillon, 61, defended the money he has received from the development fund, saying it has allowed him to cover the expenses associated with raising and caring for greyhounds. With an operation that includes six employees and 180 dogs, which he said costs about \$3,000 each to train and raise, McMillon said, "I went years when I didn't make any money."

One of the reasons McMillon has received the largest portion of the fund has to do with the performance of his dogs in recent years, he said. Last year, he said his dogs finished first, second and third in two races.

But it hasn't always been that way. McMillon said if you were to average the amount he's received from the fund since moving to West Virginia from Florida in the late 1980s, it would show a different story.

"You'll see the reality," he said, noting that the fund has helped a lot of people over the years.

According to the records request, 73 recipients, which includes individuals and their businesses, received a total of \$10.2 million in the last two years.

More than \$6.8 million or 67 percent of the \$10.2 million in total funds went to just 10 individuals or their businesses, according to records.

Among the list of recipients are Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin's mother, Freda, and brother, Carl. The Tomblins and their businesses have received \$581,640 since May 2013.

Other notable figures such as Sam Burdette, president of the West Virginia Owners and Breeders Association, and Lester Raines, a local car dealer, received \$19,397 and \$185,333, respectively.

The public records request by Grey2K is part of the organization's efforts to end greyhound racing in West Virginia.

Dorchak said she hopes lawmakers will once again take up the issue during the 2016 session. "This gravy train never ends unless the Legislature acts and I hope it does," she said.

But McMillon said the criticism of greyhound racing by Grey2K is nothing more than propaganda.

Calling the organization frauds, the kennel owner said Grey2K relies on donations, which he said means they don't necessarily want to see greyhound racing end.

"They should be in jail," he said of the organization.

McMillon said he is skeptical Grey2K will be successful in their efforts to end dog racing in West Virginia.

"The tracks and the casinos are not going to put up \$70 million to say we don't want racing," he said. "The state is not going to put up any money to get rid of dog racing."

For a complete list of all the recipients of the Greyhound Breeding Development Fund, visit <http://blogs.charlestondaily.com/capitolnotebook/>.

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