

The Oregonian

Pet Talk: Oregon groups work to rescue retired racing greyhounds

By Monique Balas | For The Oregonian/OregonLive

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(Terri Jacobson/Courtesy of Oregon Greyhound Adoption)

Greyhounds are known for their ability to sprint, but it turns out these gentle dogs also have a knack for bounding their way into human hearts.

Greyhound racing stopped in Oregon after the Multnomah Greyhound Park closed in 2004, although it's still technically legal here. A [bill that would prohibit it](#) faltered in the Legislature this spring.

Luckily for them, a pack of passionate volunteers are dedicated to transporting retired racing greyhounds from other states to find them loving homes in the Northwest.

"We think of them as retired athletes, so we think of ourselves as their retirement plan," says Janet Chandler, a board member with the nonprofit group [Greyhound Pet Adoption Northwest](#).

Like many people who work with these dogs, Chandler began volunteering because she fell in love with the breed and couldn't bear to think of the alternative once their career was over.

Her group is one of several rescues in the state devoted to bringing greyhounds to Oregon safely and providing them with permanent, loving homes.

Where the dogs come from

Greyhound racing still occurs in seven states, according to [Grey2K USA](#), an advocacy group working to stop greyhound racing. They include Arizona, Iowa, Arkansas, Alabama, West Virginia, Florida and Texas – although the last track in Texas will [close at the end of the year](#).

Greyhound Pet Adoption Northwest gets dogs primarily from Tuscon, Ariz., the closest state with an active greyhound track, and a breeding farm in Abilene, Kan.

They have developed relationships with trusted trainers who will contact them when they have dogs that can't race as a result of either retirement or temperament.

Greyhound Pet Adoption Northwest also takes on senior and medically needy dogs. If an owner is no longer able to care for a dog for financial or other reasons, they require the dog be returned.

In order to transport the dogs to Oregon, the groups have "designated drivers" who are charged with driving across the country and back.

One such driver is Jackie Holstrom, a volunteer with GPA-NW who enjoys going on the "hauls" to get the dogs and bring them here to Oregon.

It takes about 24 hours to drive from Oregon to Arizona straight through, and about 30 to 32 hours on the way back, she says, depending on how many stops the dogs need to make. The trek to Kansas takes a few hours longer.

"We're pretty beat by the time we get back," Holstrom says, "but it's well worth it."

"I like to drive, I like the road trips, I like going and staying out with different people, going to different parts of the country," says Holstrom, a retired high school instructional assistant. "It's kind of fun to see different things."

Once the dogs arrive here, volunteers are charged with the important task of caring for the dogs and ensuring they go to appropriate homes.

Another Portland-area rescue is [Oregon Greyhound Adoption](#), which gets dogs from Kansas and Tulsa, Okla.

Both volunteer-based nonprofits are neutral on the issue of racing and aren't interested in engaging in political debate. Instead, they devote their limited resources to caring for and finding homes for the dogs.

The primary difference between them is that Greyhound Pet Adoption Northwest uses [foster homes](#), and Oregon Greyhound Adoption keeps their dogs at a kennel in Sandy.

They each require an application, interview and home visit, and then work to match up available dogs with the right families.

At Oregon Greyhound Adoption, volunteer Vicki Coombs conducts the home visits and helps with placements.

"When I go into a home, I usually take one of my dogs with me, and I kind of look for the atmosphere, how it feels in the home, and how does my dog respond to these people," she says.

Coombs also looks to see how well the home is set up for a dog, whether they have a fence or are willing to put up a baby-gate and whether the new owners are willing to walk the dog and spend time with it.

"We cat-test all the dogs to see if they're going to be OK to live with a small dog or cat," Coombs says.

The groups also arrange for the dogs to get spayed or neutered, vaccinated and receive other necessary veterinary care before placing them in homes.

Dr. Stephanie Ricker, a veterinarian at [Southgate Animal Clinic](#), treats many of the dogs rescued by Oregon Greyhound Adoption.

The retired racing dogs she sees are generally fairly healthy, aside from the occasional injury, she says.

Greyhounds are prone to periodontal disease or gum recession, so she recommends good home dental hygiene and a teeth cleaning at least once a year.

"They're wonderful for people who love to get out and walks," Ricker says. "They're very social, bonded with their people and like attention."

As pets, greyhounds are actually fairly low-maintenance, say those who know and love these dogs. They're clean, quiet "couch potatoes" who enjoy curling up and taking a nap. Many of the dogs placed through OGA live in townhouses or apartments, Coombs says.

"Once you've adopted a greyhound, that's what you're going to adopt," she says. "Most people don't go back to other breeds."