

PHOTOS/POLL Protesters rally at Bonita Springs track against inhumane treatment of greyhounds

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BONITA SPRINGS — If you look inside the velvety ears of Lyndi, a 6-year-old, ginger-colored greyhound, you can still see the faded, green tattoos that indicate her birth month and year, what order she was born in her litter and her racing registration number.

“Lyndi was injured, and they were going to put her down,” said Renee Buongiorno, who rescued Lyndi from an untimely death that awaited her because she could no longer race.

It’s because of dogs like Lyndi that Buongiorno and about 20 other members of Grey2K USA — a national, nonprofit that is dedicated to passing stronger greyhound protection laws and ending the cruelty of dog racing — came out to protest in front of the Naples-Fort Myers greyhound track Saturday.

Lyndi, who broke her leg while racing, and another rescued greyhound named Meg, stood on the side of Bonita Beach Road with the sign-holding Grey2K protesters to help send a message to people driving by.

“The whole thing is just to try and educate people and tell them that greyhound racing is not a sport,” said Chuck Danielian, an area activist for Grey2K USA.

Danielian and the other Grey2K members hope to raise awareness in the community about greyhound racing and the inhumane treatment of racing dogs.

“Animals shouldn’t be used for entertainment whether it be on a greyhound track or in a circus,” Danielian said.

Although no national statistics are available, Grey2K members estimate that thousands of greyhounds sustain serious injuries from racing every year, and when they are no longer able to compete, they are killed.

According to the organization’s Web site, between 2002 and 2008, more than 800 dogs were injured while racing in Massachusetts alone.

This was the fourth protest at the Naples-Fort Myers greyhound racing track in Bonita

Springs that Pauline Wood has attended since she became a member of Grey2K about eight years ago.

"I feel that if you do your research — and there's a lot of information on the Internet — that you'll find this is a very cruel form of entertainment," said Woods, who was holding a sign that read "End Greyhound Racing."

Almost all the Grey2K members — who protested from about 2 p.m. to around 4 p.m. — held signs that read "You bet they die," "End suffering of greyhounds, stop dog racing" and "Greyhounds are love."

Since Grey2K USA was founded in 2001, the dog racing industry has been cut in half, with the closure of 24 tracks. There are 23 remaining dog tracks in just eight states.

While attempting to interview customers leaving the greyhound track Saturday, a writer covering the story for the Daily News was ordered off the property by security and denied access to visit the kennels where they keep the racing dogs.

No one from the Naples-Fort Myers track, which has been operating since the 1970s, was available for comment Saturday about the protest.

Marilyn Coffaro, who watched the greyhound races for her first time during the protest Saturday, said she thought the races were entertaining, but admitted that she knew nothing about how the racing dogs are treated outside of the public eye.

"You don't know what happens to them off the track," Coffaro said. "I would like to take a peek at where they live and so forth. I love animals, but I would like to see what happens that you don't see."

Coffaro said that if she had proof that the greyhounds were treated poorly, she would no longer go to greyhound races.

Most people in the passing cars honked and gave a thumbs up to show their approval of the protesters — who lined the sidewalks on the intersection of Bonita Beach Road and Race Track Road.

However, several people flipped the sign-holding protesters the bird and told them to "get a life."

One man leaving the racing track held up fanned-out dollar bills in his hand to show the protesters the money he won from the races that day.

Earlier

A group of 20 greyhound advocates gathered today at the Naples-Fort Myers Greyhound Track in Bonita Springs for a rally against inhumane treatment of greyhounds.

The protest was arranged by the GREY2K USA animal protection activist group at the track at 10601 Bonita Beach Road.

The group gathered around 2 p.m. and plans to be there until around 4 p.m. Protesters carried signs such as "Stop Dog Racing" and urging an end to the mistreatment of greyhounds.

Track operators weren't immediately available for a response.

A writer covering the story for the Daily News was ordered off the property when trying to interview track patrons about dog racing and the protest.

In a press release, the group stated: "At Naples-Fort Myers Greyhound Track, hundreds of dogs endure lives of nearly endless confinement, kept in small cages barely large enough for them to stand up or turn around for long hours each day. Also, many are seriously injured while racing. This cruelty has continued for over 50 years now.

"Every major animal protection group opposes commercial dog racing. Since 2001, the dog racing industry has been cut in half, with the closure of 24 dog tracks. There are currently 23 remaining dog tracks in just eight states.

GREY2K USA is a national, nonprofit greyhound protection organization with more than 25,000 supporters in 50 states.

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