

Letter to the editor: Clearing up 'misconceptions'

CNC
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Saugus -

To the editor:

This letter was created by the hard-working, tax-paying Massachusetts greyhound kennel operators, owners and trainers responding to a letter recently published in newspapers across the state by Wayne Pacello, president and CEO of The Humane Society of the United States.

Mr. Pacello's misleading information was simply a continuation of "scare tactics" used by anti-greyhound racing groups in an attempt to ban greyhound racing in Massachusetts. These organizations continually skew information, often from other areas of the country or even around the world, to attack the rights of Massachusetts kennel operators and owners to pursue a living for them and their families.

We would like to clear up some misconceptions, written by Mr. Pacello, about our business in Massachusetts with cold, hard facts:

"...an anachronistic industry with a demonstrated record of indifference and inhumane treatment to dogs — greyhound racing."

Why would owners who have invested thousands of dollars in each of these athletes (greyhounds) treat them cruelly or inhumanely? To the contrary, greyhounds in Massachusetts are arguably the best cared for and protected animal in our state due to the many laws and regulations governed by local and state agencies overseeing every aspect of their care. Comprehensive rules and regulations cover everything from housing, nutrition and exercise to track conditions, weather, crate sizes and retirement. It is unlawful to euthanize an adoptable greyhound in Massachusetts.

Citizens (of Massachusetts) were denied the opportunity to vote on this issue in the last election when a dog protection measure was stricken from the ballot.

Why? Mr. Pacello failed to mention that this action, which failed to pass in 2000, was denied in 2004 when the Massachusetts SJC voted 5-0 against it because, attempting to play upon the public's emotions and gain support to ban greyhound racing, the measure included police, seeing eye and fighting dogs. Fortunately, though, the presiding judges saw through the smokescreen, noting that it was a cover-up and just a scam to get rid of dog racing.

The animals conscripted into this industry often spend up to 22 hours a day in confinement — in small kennels that do not allow them to move around or socialize.

Racing greyhounds in Massachusetts are housed in climate-controlled buildings consisting of relatively large crates, in relations to the size of greyhounds, with the dimensions written into the existing rules and regulations by a committee comprised of representatives of the Massachusetts State Racing Commission, its veterinarian, MSPCA and Grey2K. These crates are comparable to the largest crate sold at PETCO for dogs like Great Danes and St. Bernard.

The most important part of a greyhound's day is his or her recreational time in the kennel yard, which they usually spend with 20 of their kennelmates. Not only is this where greyhounds do their business, it's also, more importantly, where they play and interact with each other as well as their trainers and handlers. Recreation time is scheduled twice in the morning, once in the afternoon and again at night. Greyhounds racing during the morning and evening receive additional recreation time in order for them to be evaluated after exercising or racing that day. Recreation time also serves as an invaluable tool for trainers to judge a greyhound's conditioning. Recreation times amount to several hours per day for each greyhound.

"...many others (greyhounds) are discarded and are killed when they are not performing well at the tracks."

There has been no documented evidence of cruelty by an owner/trainer to a greyhound in Massachusetts since racing was legalized in 1935. The greyhound adoption program used in Massachusetts has worked so well that it should serve as a model throughout the racing industry. All retiring greyhound racers in Massachusetts are "adopted out" through nonprofit organizations and today, the demand for greyhound adoption often outweighs the supply.

If residents want to gamble, there are several other forms of organized wagering that do not involve the mistreatment of dogs.

What mistreatment of greyhounds has occurred in Massachusetts? Greyhound racing is highly regulated by the Massachusetts Racing Commission, enforced by state and local police in addition to state-approved veterinarians and the MSPCA, and racing complies with the American Veterinary Medical Association. Racing, incidentally, has the greatest "return" of any form of legalized gambling including state lotteries, slot machines, table games, etc.

Greyhounds were born to run. As "bird dogs," they see, hear and chase. They are at their happiest going to race, tails wagging in anticipation as they prepare for transportation from the kennel to the racetrack for exercise, training or racing. At the recent fourth annual Greyhound Adoption Expo held at the two greyhound racetracks in Massachusetts, Wonderland and Raynham-Taunton, more than 100 retired racers thoroughly enjoyed short runs on the track competing against each other for fun.

People in the greyhound industry have been unfairly portrayed by anti-racing groups as "bad guys." We hope that by reading this letter we've cleared up some of the misconceptions about our business and the sport of greyhound racing.

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