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NEWS

Friday October 22, 2010

Commission details mistreatment incidents at Nitro track

by Billy Wolfe Daily Mail staff

The state Racing Commission has released details of animal mistreatment at the Mardi Gras Racetrack in Nitro that occurred earlier this year.

Since January, judges at Mardi Gras Racetrack (formerly called Tri-State Racetrack and Gaming Center) have terminated state-issued licenses for two workers who abused greyhounds in their care.

One of those workers was a repeat offender.

James Edgar Childress, 40, a kennel helper with Xtreme Kennels, was disciplined by judges in May 2009 for hitting a dog.

Judges suspended Childress' license for a week and ordered him to undergo anger management training, with the provision that his license would be terminated if he committed further violations.

Childress, who could not be located for comment, found himself in front of judges again in April for abusing a greyhound. His license was terminated for the most recent offense.

Judges Matthew Barnes, Elijah Williams and Barbara Rumbaugh relied on the written testimony of three witnesses to make their ruling.

The three witnesses apparently also worked at the track.

According to testimony, Childress was walking a dog when it slipped out of its collar and ran. The dog ran over to a group of other employees, who held on to the dog so that Childress could put the collar back on.

Childress then approached the other workers and grabbed the dog by the neck and ear and threw it in a truck, witnesses said.

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The Associated Press The West Virginia Racing Commission has released details of a couple of incidents of animal mistreatment at Mardi Gras Racetrack. Two workers had their licenses suspended this year for abusing dogs in their care.

"As Laura was holding the dog for (Childress) so he could put its collar back on, he grabbed the dog by the neck and twisted its skin and pulled up, lifting its front feet off the ground," witness Keith Balcom wrote. "You could tell the dog was in pain all the way back to the truck."

Another witness, Laura Byrnes, said the dog was "screaming uncontrollably as (Childress) threw her in the truck."

Kayla Bennett, another witness in the case, said she was "concerned" by Childress' behavior. According to her testimony,

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Childress grabbed the dog by the ear and pulled it to the truck while it "yelped loudly."

The ruling terminating Childress' license states that his behavior "placed the greyhound at risk," and is "detrimental to the best interest of greyhound racing."

Details of the Childress case, including written witness testimony, were made available to the Daily Mail Thursday.

The release of the documents came on the heels of a strongly worded letter to the racing commission from a national anti-greyhound racing group.

GREY2K USA, a Massachusetts-based nonprofit that is working to phase out greyhound racing nationwide, learned of the ruling against Childress just recently, Executive Director Carey Theil said.

The organization filed a records request on Oct. 1 under the state's open records statute.

The written request asked for "any documents, photographs, corresponding exhibits and other information related to greyhound disciplinary rulings and investigations."

But all the group got in response was a copy of the official ruling against Childress. No other documents were provided.

Theil responded with a letter outlining his concerns.

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