

# NEW ENGLAND

## Mass. Initiative On Greyhounds Hits the Tracks

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Massachusetts' greyhound racetracks could go to the dogs under a November ballot initiative fielded by an energetic animal-rights organization.

The group, Grey2K, gathered more than 100,000 signatures to place on the Nov. 7 ballot what is known as Question 3, which proposes a total ban on dog racing in the state by June 2001. Now it is running a strong campaign against the two greyhound racetracks in the state, Raynham-Taunton Greyhound Park and Wonderland Greyhound Park, in Revere.

Grey2K, which has a mailing address in Boston, has raised \$326,688 in donations, according to the Massachusetts Office of Campaign and Political Finance. The Animal Rescue League of Boston recently gave \$100,000, though most donations have been under \$100, according to the finance office.

Track owners, meanwhile, are taking the initiative seriously. "We're definitely going to have a fight on our hands," says Glenn Totten, of Totten Communications Inc., an Alexandria, Va., consultant hired by the Massachusetts Animal Interest Coalition, the group formed by the racetrack owners to defeat the ballot initiative.

### Precedent Potential

If the initiative passes, it would be the first time in the U.S. that an animal-rights organization has shut down a working dog track. (Six states *without* active tracks have outlawed dog racing in recent years.) The industry—50 tracks nationwide—is closely watching Massachusetts' debate, according to a spokeswoman for the American Greyhound Track Operators Association in Casselberry, Fla.

Initiative backers, meanwhile, are trying to rally voters with a humanitarian appeal. "It is a call all across the state for this industry that is inhumane to end," says Carey Theil, the media director recruited from his home in Oregon by Grey2K. (At 22, Mr. Theil, a former national chess champion, has five years of lobbying and political organizing under his belt, including, at 19, having run the U.S. senate campaign of state Sen. John

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# An Initiative to End Greyhound Racing Hits Mass. Tracks

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Lim, a Republican of Oregon, who lost to Democrat incumbent Ron Wyden.) Mr. Theil says that puppies that aren't fast enough are killed, dogs are kept muzzled and in cages most of the day and because there aren't enough homes for them after they end their track careers, many retired racers end up being killed.

George L. Carney Jr., president and treasurer of the Massasoit Greyhound Association Inc., which runs the Raynham-Taunton track, responds: "We run a clean place. We have great food. People come on Friday and Saturday nights and have a good time at blue-collar prices." The dogs, which cost between \$2,500 and \$3,000, aren't abused in Massachusetts, Mr. Carney says. "We will prevail."

The track coalition has gathered \$260,500 in nine donations, with \$200,000 coming from Mr. Carney, state records show. Charles F. Sarkis, principal shareholder of Revere-based Westwood Group Inc., parent company of Wonderland Greyhound Park and a principal shareholder of Boston's Back Bay Restaurant Group Inc., which owns 34 eateries, has chipped in \$25,000, while the seven other donations came from out-of-state, racing-related enterprises, state records show.

With five weeks left to go, the race is getting emotional. "This really comes down to a gut feeling of whether people in Massachusetts want to race dogs," says state Rep. Daniel Bosley, chairman of the Government Regulations Committee, which oversees gambling in Massachusetts.

In libraries and private homes all over the state, Grey2K has been showing a video of Florida greyhounds with big brown eyes being euthanized and hauled away in a truck. Grey2K has also hired Washington, D.C., political consultant Peter Fenn to fashion television ads and is mailing thousands of pieces of promotional literature each week.

## Grey 2K Supporters

According to Mr. Theil, Grey2K has more than 1,000 volunteers. Among them are Marian Penny and Rita Escor, of Stoughton, who volunteer weekly at Grey2K's bustling office. "I've had two greyhounds and got one for a friend and I think they're the greatest," says Ms. Penny, who was stuffing envelopes that would be mailed to 3,000 people.

Racetrack owners paint Grey2K as a group of radicals bent on destroying a faltering but lucrative business. "These extremists oppose everything from lifesaving biomedical research to hunting, fishing, eating meat and wearing leather," says a full-page ad in the racing program of the Raynham-Taunton track.

ton, Mass., and the treasurer of Grey2K, resists that portrayal. "I eat meat. I have leather sneakers on right now," says Ms. Hopfenbeck, who runs Sutton Animal Hospital, and has treated greyhounds for 10 years. She says she objects to greyhound racing because the sport causes overbreeding of the animals and then doesn't handle the aftermath. Nearly all greyhounds are too slow to race by the time they are three years old, she says, and are either adopted, placed on greyhound farms, donated to laboratories or killed outright. "The adoption centers can't take them all," says Ms. Hopfenbeck.

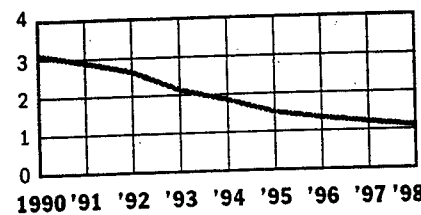
According to racetrack-affiliated American Greyhound Council, of Abilene, Kan., fewer than 9,500 greyhounds were killed in 1996. Grey2K estimates that about 20,000 greyhounds are killed each year.

## Employment Issue

According to Mr. Totten, the track group's consultant, racetrack owners plan to seek the endorsement of the state's hunt-

## To the Dogs

Attendance falls at Massachusetts dog races, in millions



Source: Massachusetts Racing Commission

ers, trappers and dairy farmers. The group has already won the approval of the AFL-CIO, some of whose members work at the tracks.

A Web site run by the track owners' coalition (maic2000.org) points to job preservation as one reason for protecting the tracks. The site says nearly 2,000 people in Massachusetts work full time and part time at the tracks. But figures provided by track representatives add up to a total of only about half that. Mr. Carney estimates his track employs somewhere between 135 to 150 full-time workers and 350 part-timers. Richard Dalton, president and chief executive of Westwood Group and Wonderland, says that track has 450 employees in all and that he can't provide figures for the breakdown between full- and part-timers.

Meanwhile, Robert M. Hutchinson Jr., chairman of the Massachusetts Racing Commission, supports the track owners and says that while attendance at the tracks has been dropping, it still continues "to be a cash cow."

During the past 10 years, attendance at the state's tracks has dropped to 1.1 million in 1998 from 3.1 million in 1990. The state's income from the tracks fell to \$8.4 million last year from \$28.6 million in 1990, according to the racing commission.