

Cloverleaf says no live dog racing in '07

BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS,

DENVER — Cloverleaf Kennel Club in Loveland, blaming state regulations and competition from casinos, said Thursday it would not hold live greyhound racing in 2007.

“We just don’t have the financial wherewithal now to run another live season,” President David J. Scherer said.

He did not rule out a sale of the facility, which began holding live races in 1955, but said the board of directors was examining its options and that any decision would take time.

The company is not applying for a license for live racing for next year, but satellite wagering will continue.

Scherer said several factors led to the decision, including new state laws that ate into revenues, the cost of resurfacing its track, and little chance of legislative relief for the racing industry in the future.

Under state law, the pari-mutuel industry funds the operations of the state racing commission. In addition, the club was struggling to pay to resurface the track, something that could cost \$50,000 to \$100,000 as revenues were falling, Scherer said.

An employee who did not want his name used because he was not authorized to speak to the media said the club started last season \$250,000 in the hole. Scherer said the figure was close.

“We were losing money in the last few years,” he said.

In recent years, the company supported legislation to allow poker rooms or video lottery terminals at racetracks to draw more business, but Gov. Bill Owens, a Republican, opposed it. Scherer said it was unknown whether Democrat Bill Ritter would support such legislation after he takes office.

“We can’t bank on what he might do. We don’t have the time. We’re down to the time where we have to bite the bullet,” Scherer said.

In its heyday, the track hosted up to 3,000 people a night, Scherer said. More recently, during a four-month live racing season, it was holding 120 races a week with average weekly attendance of about 3,000.

Scherer said Mile High Greyhound Park in Commerce City would likely pick up Cloverleaf’s live races.

Nationwide, there were 38 commercial greyhound tracks in 13 states with live racing, according to the National Greyhound Association.

Carey Theil, executive director of the national greyhound protection organization Grey2K USA, said there were more than 50 in the early 1990s, but numbers have dropped as state lotteries and casinos have exploded.

Theil called the announcement by Cloverleaf a victory for dog lovers.

“Every year thousands of dogs are injured while competing in the pari-mutuel racing industry. They live lives of intense confinement while they’re at the racetrack,” Theil said.

Cloverleaf has said it supports animal welfare guidelines.

Cloverleaf Kennel Club Inc. was chartered in 1953. During the Big Thompson flood in 1976, it opened its grandstand and racing facility as a warehouse for hard goods for aid, Scherer said.