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OU alumna helps others—including dogs

By **Rebecca Wyatt Thomas**, OU Web Writer

Suzanne Kimmerly, SEHS '82 and '84, has always liked helping others. She started at Oakland University with the desire to go into nursing but found her true passion in counseling. While she likes helping people, she has also devoted her life to helping dogs, specifically greyhounds who have been dropped off the racing circuit. Most are given two fates: go to a rescue society or be killed. Kimmerly, who works with **Michigan Retired Greyhounds as Pets** (MI REGAP) is helping to place the dogs in caring homes.

Nine years ago, Kimmerly came across greyhounds at a local meet and greet.

"I love the dogs. I said to my family 'the next dog we get is going to be a greyhound,'" Kimmerly said. They did adopt a greyhound, and then two more, along with fostering one at a time as part of REGAP. She became more involved with the program as time went on.

"These dogs are just used for gambling. That's what they are bred to do. Once they aren't profitable anymore they are sent to adoption groups or killed. It's so abusive that if there is something I can do to end greyhound racing forever, that's where I want to put my efforts," said Kimmerly, who is trying to raise awareness of the dogs and find more people to take them in. "They are very low maintenance dogs. They are just so easy to take care of. They are adult dogs when they come to us, so they transition into home life very easily."

Kimmerly said 12,000 dogs per year are killed when they are done racing. REGAP, one of the larger greyhound rescue leagues in Michigan, has placed 1,300 greyhounds into homes since it was started in 1994.

Florida is a big state for greyhound racing. The closest facility to Michigan, where gambling on dog racing is illegal, is Wisconsin. Kimmerly said that while gambling on dog racing is illegal, there are underground racing groups in Michigan. Many of those in the underground world will breed racing greyhounds with coonhounds to get fast hunting dogs called lurchers. REGAP also takes in the lurchers.

"People don't see these lurchers as pets. They are often classified as livestock. They are the only breed of dog excluded from the pet category. We have some in foster care now. They are just as great as pure greyhounds," Kimmerly said.

Some of the greyhounds also come in with injuries from running. REGAP takes these dogs because they are at a higher risk of being euthanized. They get the dogs the care they need before they are adopted.

Kimmerly said the greyhounds are crated and muzzled most of the day and are often starved for attention when they reach a foster home.

"We do a lot of meet and greets. People are also so surprised that the dogs aren't hyper, high-strung, mean dogs," Kimmerly said.

REGAP has 30 dogs in foster care. They also participate in the Second Chance at Life program with 12 Michigan prisoners. The dogs live in the cell with the prisoner for 10 weeks for obedience training and are then adopted by families.

"The foster dogs are kept in homes with families. They must provide food. The vet care, leashes, collars and tags all come from donations that we work our tails off to get," Kimmerly said. "We attend meet and greets. We have no overhead, no office and no paid staff. Everything is done by phone and e-mail. This allows 100 percent of the money we raise to go toward the care of the dogs."

The dogs that are adopted are sent to their new homes after being spayed or neutered, having a dental cleaning and getting up to date on their shots.

MI REGAP hosts a number of fundraisers each year to support its efforts. Dog-Day Afternoon: A Ride to Benefit a Biker's Best Friend, an escorted motorcycle ride to raise awareness about how dogs assist people in everyday life and emergencies, will be held May 18 from American Harley Davidson in Ann Arbor to Willow Run Airport. The MI REGAP annual golf outing will be held in June.

For more information on how to participate in the fundraisers, adopt a dog or get involved with MI REGAP, visit the **REGAP** Web site.



OU alumna Suzanne Kimmerly works with Michigan Retired Greyhounds as Pets (MI REGAP) to place the dogs in caring homes. (Photo Courtesy of REGAP)

SUMMARY

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