

Amanda's Diary

We continue our monthly update with RGT co-ordinator Amanda Ainsworth on some of the issues that she and the headquarters staff have been tackling in recent weeks.



Amanda received a particularly upsetting phone call recently.

She said: "It was from a trainer trying to get us to take a dog. I explained that we cannot possibly take him at the moment, to which he replied, 'you are making me put the dog to sleep.'"

"I was so angry at what was a blatant piece of blackmail. I reminded him that the dog was his responsibility and he must do with him as he sees fit."

Given a few minutes to calm down, the normally unflappable Amanda regained enough composure to see a positive aspect to

the call.

She said: "I am still angry, but it did occur to me that this was the first phone call of this type that I had received in over a year. There was a time when we would get at least one a week."

The call also resurrected one of the worst memories in Amanda's entire career in home-finding.

The date is easy to recall, July 2006 and Amanda took a call from one of the branches, asking head office to take in two grad-

ed runners Clash Nitro and Rent A Flyer.

She said: "The branch asked if we could take the two dogs immediately and I told them that we couldn't for another week. The reply was 'I don't think he is prepared to wait.'"

A few days later Amanda took a call from a journalist from The Sunday Times. Within days, the whole country would be made aware of 'Seaham'.

Amanda said: "I threw up when I heard the dogs names. I

blamed myself for the two dogs dying though later reflected that if it hadn't been them, it would probably have been two others."

The positive aspect to the sad tale was that it brought a huge increase in RGT funding which eventually reached £1.7m per year.

However subsequent cut-backs brought about by reduced betting turnover has brought about inevitable cuts.

Amanda said: "By late 2008/2009 we were paying for over 1,000 dogs in kennels."

"We set ourselves a target of 650 but given the number of large kennels that have closed down, we haven't been able to keep to that."

"The most recent is Steve King from whom we have taken 32 dogs, plus the regular small kennels."

"We are probably between 100-150 over our target and given the time of the year, it will be difficult to get that down over the next few weeks."



Retirement Plans

DECEMBER EVENTS		
Event	Date	Branch
Market Stall - Beverley	Saturday 24	East Riding
Greyhound Walk - Studley Royal	Tuesday 27	North Yorkshire
JANUARY EVENTS		
New Years Day Walk And BBQ!	Sunday 1	Essex - Waltham Abbey
Pets@Home Bridlington	Saturday 14 1-4	Bridlington
Morrisons, Harrogate	Friday 27	North Yorkshire
Monthly Walk - Tunstall Reservoir	Saturday 28	Durham - Hollin Hall
Morrisons, Harrogate	Saturday 28	North Yorkshire
Collection at Tesco, Mold	Saturday 28	Shropshire and Borders

have increased our grant income thanks to support from various charitable trusts who recognise that a particularly significant percentage of funds donated to RGT are directed at our core rehoming activities.

Running almost in parallel with the fundraising campaigns are the promotional activities that include straight forward advertising, attendance at shows, fairs and events and a strengthened online presence.

Promotion at branch level is vital to maintaining a healthy rehoming rate and, as an example, those shopping at Lakeside, Essex should notice an RGT advertisement playing on screens throughout the centre, that has already generated a number of rehoming.

National need

I would argue that a degree of national promotion is also required to strengthen the RGT brand and the message that greyhounds make great pets and the New Year is an opportunity for us to review how we promote greyhounds as pets at both scales, seeking new opportunities to put the breed in front of the public.

Already we are exploring some interesting projects including the scope to introduce greyhounds to selected prisons, where they can support animal care learning opportunities that have been so successful in the US at helping to rehabilitate offenders and reduce

recidivism.

We also want to introduce greyhounds to a greater number of residential and nursing homes, where the dogs can provide tremendous companionship for the elderly.

Alongside these initiatives, the Trust is improving its use of social media, developing new Facebook and Twitter pages (www.twitter.com/rgt_uk) and reorganising elements of its website to increase awareness of our work and provide platforms for cost-effective, mass marketing and PR.

Holding Up

So, while the year 2011 has certainly been a challenging one for RGT and a depressed economy with high unemployment and reduced consumer spending could hardly be described as an ideal environment for fundraising and finding permanent, loving homes for retired athletes, the charity's performance is holding up well and we will rehome in the region of 4,000 greyhounds this year.

Indications suggest demand for our services will remain high in 2012 and the Trust will continue to do what it can to help as many greyhounds as possible, develop its fundraising and spread awareness of the suitability of greyhounds as pets.

By continuing to build confidence, understanding and support for what we do, I am confident the charity can go from strength to strength.

2011 was tough but next year won't be any easier!

RGT Chief Executive Peter Laurie takes us through the early months in his new job

I write this article just over five months since I took up my role at the Retired Greyhound Trust.

It's a very exciting and active organisation to be involved with and within days of joining in July my diverse duties included reporting on the Trust's activities to the All Party Parliamentary Greyhound Group, attending the Association of Cats and Dogs Homes meeting in Ireland, reconvening the RGT Finance Committee and running a stand, with colleagues Amanda Ainsworth and Jenny Greenshields, at the Over Fifties show at Olympia.

Now, as the show season is over and rehoming has slowed in the run-up to Christmas, it is timely to reflect on what has been a very enjoyable but also challenging first few months at the Trust.

One of the first things that struck me on my arrival in Worcester Park was the sense of common purpose and the total commitment of everyone within the charity to its primary objective of finding homes for ex-racers.

Solid branches

That is never more evident than at the branches and one of the elements of the job I have enjoyed the most is visiting 23 of our 72 branches so far this year.

At every branch I have met volunteers whose passion and dedication to the cause is remarkable and by talking to them, and of course to Amanda, Ivor, Jenny, Hazel, Trish and Steph (who have more than 35 years head office experience between them), I have begun to appreciate the challenges and opportunities that the charity faces.

Whilst few of our branch kennels could be considered five-star canine hotels, of those I have visited it is very clear that the needs of all the resident greyhounds are met.

The vast majority of greyhounds I have seen have been in excellent or outstanding condition and that is a testament to the hard work of those that care for them.

Yes, the occasional dog enters RGT care in less than brilliant physical condition but the Trust policy is to deal with all veterinary matters straight away including getting greyhounds neutered, vaccinated if necessary and their teeth cleaned, so the greyhounds can be introduced to the public and are ready for rehoming without delay.

But such a rigorous approach to ensuring veterinary care does mean that veterinary costs, after kennelling, are the second largest expenditure category and reducing our spend here without compromising our welfare standards

remains an important focus.

By reviewing our procurement of veterinary services, negotiating hard and seeking mutually-beneficial partnerships with key practices, we have been able to generate some worthwhile savings.

We will also continue to work with GBGB and the sport's stakeholders to promote good canine dental care and encourage more greyhounds to arrive at RGT with up to date and certified vaccinations.

It would help too if bitches in particular were neutered in advance and it still surprises me that more trainers don't spay their lower-grade bitches whilst racing, thus preventing seasonal interruption, the need for suppressants and accelerating their rehoming on retirement.

My joining the RGT has coincided with demand for the RGT's services at a level unprecedented in the charity's 36 year history.

This heightened demand can be attributed to the large number of trainers leaving the sport for various reasons but also, to an extent, to the very positive cultural change that has swept across racing in recent years and from which more and more trainers and their owners are doing the right thing and seeking homes for their greyhounds on retirement.

£700 per dog

Fortunately, most practitioners placing a greyhound with RGT are conscious of the Trust's charitable status and, even when in the toughest of circumstances themselves, manage to find a contribution towards the average £700 cost of rehoming a dog.

Others sadly don't and whilst a number of trainers are unfortunately finding themselves in serious financial predicaments, the reality is that within our own budget RGT cannot be expected to take in often unspecified but large numbers of dogs at the drop of a hat and entirely at the charity's expense.

A core objective for the Trust is the development of its national, co-ordinated programme of fundraising initiatives.

Implementing the comprehensive fundraising strategy prepared for us by Compton Fundraising Consultants is an important project; in the current economic climate we have to work harder to raise the £3 - 3.5m we need to rehome 4,000 greyhounds annually.

For example, legacy income -

Peter Laurie joined the RGT with the background as a greyhound owner, trainer, administrator and enthusiast



the most unpredictable but also one of the most important of all income streams - has fallen below the five year average in 2011 but in response we are reviewing our existing pipeline, promoting legacy giving and ensuring we retain the support of our existing "living legators".

Using initiative

Our grant from the BGRF is also down this year on last but it is hoped that the new range of initiatives to promote betting on the sport has the desired effect of boosting the voluntary levy and perhaps, in turn, contributions made to RGT.

Some new fundraising initiatives have brought very encouraging early results.

Our first ever national raffle this autumn generated over £50,000 in gross proceeds, far exceeding the forecast outturn and confirming the willingness of our supporters to donate to our cause, given the right opportunity to do so.

A first fundraising direct mailing to a segment of our database

generated an encouraging response in the spring and BAGS and Satellite Information Services came on board as welcome, major donors during the year.

General donations have picked up well in the second half, and we

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Winning smile :)

Following a series of articles about greyhounds arriving at RGT branches in poor oral condition, our thanks to regular reader Cees Van Arkel for the pictures show how he keeps his dogs in top class condition.

Cees writes: "Brushing the teeth twice a week (see pictures) with an electric toothbrush and tooth-paste (and sometimes with hydrogen peroxide - 3%) and the problem is solved."

