

# Dogs may not be cleared for research

BY SUE ANNA JOE

A donation of dogs to the College of Veterinary Medicine from an Alabama racetrack has resulted in talks between lawyers representing the dogs' owners and the University. The dispute began after the owners found out that the dogs were alive and said the dogs were given to the University by a trainer without the owners' permission.

A trainer from Greentrack in Eutaw, Ala., did not inform the owners of this, and the University did not know the dogs were given without consent, John Harkness, University laboratory animal veterinarian, said. Usually, trainers act as agents for dog owners and handle the dogs according to the owners' requests.

"This is an awkward and difficult citation," Harkness said. "It's a great personal concern to any of us in the Vet School."

Phillip Nelson, associate dean of CVM, said, "This is very disturbing. We empathize with the owners."

Greentrack has since closed down.

The lawyers for the University are trying to get proof of ownership before taking further action. If this happens, both parties will discuss what will happen to each dog. "There is some room for doubt," Nelson said.

The owners of the greyhounds do not want the dogs back. Instead, they want the dogs adopted. "We're perfectly willing to consider each request," Harkness said.

Nelson said, "The owners should have a right to the final disposition of these animals."

Nelson added different factors come into play when deciding the future of each dog. "The most difficult decision is that of those who have undergone surgery. We also consider their medical condition," he said.

Greyhounds are either adopted or killed after they finish their racing careers.

Harkness said the trainer transferred the dogs to the University by signing a donation form that protected the University.

"We proceeded in good faith," Harkness said.

Nelson said, "We hold animals for a minimum of five days in case of a challenge with ownership."

Harkness said efforts are being made to locate the trainer. The University does not blame the trainer and wants to find out her relationship with the owners to help resolve the matter, Harkness added.

Several animal rights groups are supporting the owners and accusing CVM of not checking with the owners and taking the trainer's word. Harkness said CVM did not get the dogs illegally. "[The animal rights groups] are the driving force behind the owners," Harkness said.

The trainer from Greentrack gave 20 greyhounds to the University three years ago. According to Harkness, the University has received greyhounds for 13 years to use them as blood donors for privately owned dogs.

"[Greyhounds] have large veins and are easy to use as donors," he said.

After greyhounds are used as blood donors for two years, CVM puts them up for adoption.

Since 1995, greyhounds have also been used for artificial hip research at CVM. CVM removed the dogs' hip joints and replaced them with artificial ones. The dogs were sent to run on the hip, and two years later, the dogs were put to sleep. The researchers observed how closely the artificial hip was joined to the bone.

The University now has 23 greyhounds at CVM, six for blood donation. However, CVM suspended research on the dogs since the situation with the owners began. Harkness said CVM is not hiding the dogs, nor will the College kill the dogs.

The next time dogs are donated, CVM will be careful by going to the owners themselves, Harkness said.

"We hope it's resolved peacefully," Harkness said. "There are moral and legal aspects to it. I hope it works out well for everyone, especially the dogs."