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Gone to the dogs and loving it

Rescuing retired greyhounds

By **SALLY JOHNSTON**, EDMONTON SUN

Cindy Montgomery found a heart-warming way to fill her empty nest - by opening her doors to dogs facing a possible death sentence.

With her three children grown and moved out, the Sherwood Park woman dedicates her time and home to rescuing greyhounds who've grown too slow for American racetracks.

"They're polite, gentle and beautifully trained. When you look into their eyes you see right into their soul," said Montgomery, president of the Chinook Winds Greyhound Rescue Foundation.

In the past 11 years, Montgomery and other volunteers with the Alberta-based charity have found adoptive homes for more than 500 greyhounds, mostly from tracks in Oklahoma and Kansas.

Chinook Winds is part of a network of about 200 agencies throughout North America, striving to save the lives of hounds that are past their winning streak, usually by the time they are six years old.

In the past, many of the rejected hounds were put down.

Accurate adoption statistics are hard to find.

According to the website of the National Greyhound Association, which represents breeders and racers, 90% of the registered 20,000 hounds booted off the tracks annually are found new homes.

Some rescue groups believe the number is much less optimistic, at around 50%.

Montgomery's group is also working with a U.S. group, Greyhound Pets, to rescue greyhounds from Spain.

"They're not bred for racing, but for hunting. We've heard of awful things happening to them when they're too old - they're hanged from trees, dropped down wells. But we can only bring in three at a time."

Montgomery dispels the notion that greyhounds are high maintenance.

Although they can run at 70 kmh, in retirement these sleek hounds make loving and docile indoor pets who prefer to curl up on the sofa and snooze away the day, she said.

"It's a fallacy that they need a lot of exercise. A 30- to 60-minute walk each day is enough to keep a greyhound happy and healthy."

However, they should be leashed when not in a fully fenced area.

"They're sight hounds. So if they see a squirrel or a piece of paper blowing, they'll take off."

Greyhounds are easy to house train, don't bark much, hardly shed and have no "doggie" odour. But they don't make good guard dogs.

"They are bred to be good-natured and receive constant handling. They love everyone and view every stranger as a new friend," chuckled Montgomery,

Chinook Winds inspects the home of potential owners and considers issues such as other pets and small children before placing a dog.

Greyhounds are fully vetted - spayed or neutered, vaccinated and wormed and their teeth checked. The cost of adoption is a \$200 donation to Chinook Winds.

Montgomery fell in love with retired greyhounds after seeing a TV show about them.

"The sight of them running across a field for sheer joy was so beautiful it just took my breath away," she recalled.

"My husband and I went down to a racetrack in Idaho that was closing and looking for homes for their dogs. We went for one but came back with two."

Today she shares her house with her own four greyhounds: Dallas, Sophia, Blue and Mariah. She frequently offers temporary refuge to as many as six more.

For more information call Montgomery at 922-0545. Or visit www.chinookwindsgreyhounds.org.