

Ebenezer the donkey, after 83 days in a clinic, is ready to rule his field again

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Ebenezer the donkey spent 83 days at Equine Health Solutions. Before he went home Wednesday, he nuzzled Randy Phillips, who worked to save him.

But then, as if realizing where he was, he trotted toward the creek, stopping under a redbud tree.

“You’re home now, buddy,” Shirley Phillips, who saved him, said in tears.

After 83 days in a vet clinic, the “old donkey by the road” returned Wednesday to his six-acre spread on Grandview’s west edge.

This is where he belongs. Grazing on grass and drinking from the creek flowing through the woods. Waiting for someone to stop and visit, and maybe bring him a cut-up apple.

Oh, he needed the clinic. He was dying in February. He’s 32, couldn’t eat, could barely walk and wheezed from pneumonia.

But then, after a story appeared in The Kansas City Star, more than 500 people sent donations totaling more than \$10,000 to get him fixed up. Surely a Kansas City donkey-fundraising record.

Ten grand for a donkey? Yes — but not just any donkey. We’re talking about an ornery, dusty old donkey who likes to head-butt and whose hair would clean a dirty skillet.

People love him. Since the mid-1980s, he’s been standing by the road, silently inviting folks traveling 129th Street to pull over and come to the fence for a little one-sided conversation.

Phillips was one who stopped — and ended up heading his rescue effort. For weeks before that, she mixed a special mash — five pounds twice a day — so he could eat.

Ebenezer’s owner, Ben Alvarado, lives in the Ruskin area and couldn’t get out as often as he wanted. An 85-year-old World War II veteran, he and his wife both had health problems. It was hard enough to keep up with his own bills, but pile on a costly vet bill? Phillips asked him if she could help. He agreed.



They were all there for Wednesday's homecoming. Police directed traffic while the donkey climbed from his trailer. Grandview police Sgt. Larry Godfrey took Ebenezer's picture.

"I've been here 21 years, and he was here a long time before that," he said. "This old donkey sure knows a lot of people."

When he was taken to Equine Health Solutions in Raymore in February, he was suffering from white-line disease on all four hooves, and his teeth were tearing into his jaw. His weight was down, and he was depressed.

But as his health improved, his spunk came back. He became buddies with Val, a mare in the next stall.

Keith Wagner, the veterinarian, proclaimed Ebenezer healthy Wednesday.

"He's in wonderful shape, and he's ready to go home," Wagner said.

A clinic office worker bid the donkey goodbye from a cracked door because he's head-butted her a few times.

"That's just because he likes you," Phillips told the woman.

"Then he likes me a whole lot," she said.

Veterinary technician DeAnna Yehle went along for Ebenezer's trip home, explaining, "He's been a part of my life for 83 days. We're going to miss him around here."

Alvarado and his wife, Victoria, were waiting, along with other friends and neighbors, when the convoy arrived. Alvarado bought Ebenezer because when he was boy in southern Mexico, his uncle would often put him on a donkey's back to ride to town.

He has always been amazed at Ebenezer's effect on people.

"He got over 300 get-well cards when he was in the clinic," Alvarado said. "I just had cataract surgery, and I think I got two."

Ebenezer also had a new barn to come home to. While he was away, friends tore down his old shed and put up a new one with a concrete floor, to keep his hooves dry. It has a window where he can look out and a place for Alvarado and others to sit in a lawn chair.

Phillips and her husband, Randy, who did much of the work, paid for the structure because they didn't think the medical fund should be used. Some materials were donated, Phillips said as people began to leave Wednesday.

Soon, Ebenezer would be alone.

That's OK, Shirley Phillips said.

"Cars will go by, and people will honk and wave," she said. "And tonight, he'll hear the train.

"I think he missed that."

PLEASE, NO TREATS

Visitors are still welcome but are asked to forgo treats because Ebenezer can no longer eat his favorites. But if you must, apples and pears must be peeled, cored and cut up the size of croutons. Carrots must be grated. A sign will soon be posted at his gate.

His clinic stay used up most of the funds donated by the public. Some is being kept for future medical expenses. The balance will be donated to a donkey rescue organization.