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## It's okay, Ebenezer – take a big bite!



### Allen Edmonds/The Star Herald

Raymore veterinarian Keith Wagner of Equine Health Solutions teamed with Shirley Phillips of Grandview last week to put 30-plus year-old Ebenezer, a fixture in Phillips' neighborhood, back on his feet.

*By Allen Edmonds, The Star Herald*

Ebenezer can eat without pain now – he just doesn't know it.

The 30-plus year-old donkey stood motionless in the runway between stalls Tuesday morning at Equine Health Solutions, a veterinary clinic operated by Keith Wagner, DVM, just east of Raymore.

He glanced down at the pile of hay at his feet, then looked over at Val. A fellow patient of Ebenezer's, the donkey was intrigued by the Val and Wagner hopes he'll follow her lead.

"I don't know that he's ever seen a horse before, so he's pretty fascinated with her," Wagner said.

As Val grazed on the fresh hay at her feet, Wagner and Shirley Phillips watch Ebenezer hopefully.

"It'll probably take cookies," Phillips laughed.

Last week, Phillips began a crusade with a single phone call to the Kansas City Star from her Grandview home. For years, she had watched Ebenezer graze in his pasture near 129th Street. She had met his owner, a World War II veteran who fell in love with the idea of owning a donkey after he and his wife visited Israel and walked the path of Jesus.

And for years, the man cared for his animal like a member of the family.

But, as Wagner said Tuesday, things happen to all members of the equine family as they age.

"With the equine species, their teeth continue to grow until they're about 20," he said. "And then, between the ages of 20 and 25, their gums begin to recede. Ebenezer's in the 31- to 32-year-old range, his teeth were overgrown, and as he tried to chew, his teeth were actually chewing into his gum. You can imagine how painful that was."

And that led to other problems. Because he couldn't chew sufficiently, he would occasionally choke. With the choking, he ended up aspirating saliva into his lungs, leading to a lung infection.

On top of that, he was the victim of a common age-related hoof fungus called White Line Disease, that was on its way to collapsing the hard part of the hoof to the point where he was nearly supporting his weight on the soles of his feet.

"Equine soles are not designed to bear that kind of weight," Wagner said. The result was more pain than a donkey should possibly be asked to bear and weight loss that was obvious. Phillips just had to jump in.

Knowing Ebenezer's owners were older themselves and were suffering from health issues of their own, she called Wagner and asked him what it would take to get Ebenezer back in shape.

The veterinarian estimated \$1,200 to \$1,700 – certainly a significant bill, but not insurmountable to Phillips.

The day the Star article appeared, Wagner received a donation call – at 7:30 a.m.

"I didn't even know it had been in the paper yet, and here I was getting a call already," he said.

The next day, the clinic received 94 pieces of mail – all with donations enclosed.

"I called Shirley and told her she needed to get him out here, I thought we were well-fixed to get him taken care of."

By the end of last week, the hoof work had begun while Wagner medicated Ebenezer for the infection. By Monday, the infection had receded enough so the old boy could be sedated for his tooth work and the remainder of the hoof repair.

By Tuesday morning, Wagner declared him healthy again.

"But, like all donkeys, he's got a bit of an attitude. His mouth is in good shape right now – he just needs to figure out that he can eat and that he won't have all that pain."

And Wagner's bill is more than paid.

During the past week, more than \$5,000 has poured in from donors – leaving an excess of more than \$3,000. All the excess will go to a horse rescue organization in Ebenezer’s name, Wagner and Phillips agreed.

“He had some potentially life-threatening issues,” Wagner said. “But overall, he’s healthy.”

He just needs to keep watching his new friend Val and take a cue from her, they agreed.

They looked again at Ebenezer’s face – the trademark stubbornness shining through.

That part could take awhile yet.

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