

## Donkey has lots of human friends, but he needs treatment from vet - Mon, Feb. 01, 2010 11:20 PM

By DONALD BRADLEY, The Kansas City Star

A car door slams, and Ebenezer begins shambling toward the sound.

His hooves hurt so he moves slowly along the pasture path. He's also about 30 years old, and that's getting up there for a donkey.

Snow is starting to blow, but that car just might mean it's supper time. He can't graze anymore because of bad teeth, so supper time is pretty important.

"Hey, Buddy," calls Shirley Phillips, spotting him through the trees Monday evening.

Since September, Phillips has been stopping by at dawn and dusk to feed and water the old donkey that, according to his owner, has more friends than he does.

For more than a quarter century, people have pulled to the side of the road and visited with Ebenezer, who lives on a six-acre strip of pasture on Grandview's west edge. Some have told the owner, Ben Alvarado, they don't know why they stopped that first time.

Ebenezer isn't exactly cuddly. His hair is like a brush you'd use to clean a dirty skillet. Pat him and watch the dust fly.

But yet, he stands by the road and watches cars go by. People wave. Sometimes they honk.

"Sooner or later, they stop," Alvarado said. "Then the next time they bring him something to eat. They're hooked then. They'll be back."

Ebenezer has been called a good listener. When people stop talking, he'll either give a firm head butt or walk away.

Grandview music teacher Mary Elven is one of the regulars. She's delighted to see him head her way when she might have an apple or a carrot. But she believes in her heart that he would have been happy to see her if she'd come empty-handed.

She cried Monday when talking about her old friend.

"I know he is just an animal, but jeeppers, he's so special and sweet."

On a day in September, Phillips was driving to work as an account manager in Overland Park and noticed the donkey was thin. Phillips, who lives in Grandview, started feeding him daily, but he didn't seem to be getting any better.

Last week, a veterinarian said Ebenezer suffered white line disease on all four hooves, and his teeth were tearing into his jaw.

There's now a sign asking people not to feed the donkey his long-time favorites of apples and carrots.

Phillips is determined to fix him up and is hoping that Ebenezer's friends will help. The vet bill will probably run between \$1,200 and \$1,700.

Alvarado, who fought in World War II, can't afford the expense. He's 85, just had cataract surgery and his wife has health problems, too.

When he was 7 or so, his family left Kansas City, Kan., and moved to the rural lands of southern Mexico so his mother could die in her native land. His uncle would often put him on a donkey's back to ride to town.

Years later, in the mid-1980s, he and his wife, Victoria, took a trip to Israel. They wanted to walk where Jesus walked.

"We know where Jesus mounted the donkey," two boys told them near a temple in Jerusalem. The donkeys he saw that day reminded him of those days in Mexico years before.

He decided then and there he had to have one of his own. So after returning home, he bought a 2-year-old donkey from a farm in Lee's Summit.

They put Ebenezer in the pasture in Grandview. Great digs, a little barn for the bad weather, a creek winding through the trees below a ridge.

Ebenezer was shy at first. But he got over that. Soon, everybody in the area seemed to know the donkey by the road.

A few years back, during the annual Harry's Hay Days celebration in Grandview, Ebenezer escaped the pasture and headed toward the festivities.

"He must have heard the music," Alvarado figures.

Anyway, a woman recognized the donkey and knew he was not supposed to be going to Harry's Hay Days.

"Ebenezer, you turn around and go home," she scolded him.

He did.

Phillips recently called Grandview City Hall to tell about a dead deer on the property and started to give the address: "On 129th Street near ... "

"You mean where Ebenezer lives," the man interrupted.

These days, Phillips feeds the donkey 5 pounds twice a day with a mash that consists of water and Purina Equine Senior food. She takes a chair to the barn because it takes him a long time to eat. Her husband often accompanies her. He also did work on Ebenezer's shelter.

Alvarado, who lives in the Ruskin area, can't get out to see his old buddy as often. For years Ebenezer was a family pet to him and his wife, children and grandchildren.

But he knows people care for and love the donkey.

"All those people who come to visit him, they're his family now."

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### **How to help**

Anyone wishing to help with Ebenezer's veterinarian bills can send a donation, in care of Ebenezer, to Equine Health Solutions, 18011 E. State Route 58, Raymore, MO 64083. Shirley Phillips said any money left over would be donated to a horse rescue organization.