

Ebenezer the donkey dies, surrounded by friends

By DONALD BRADLEY / The Kansas City Star / February 14, 2012

Don't look for Ebenezer, the old donkey by the road. He died shortly before midnight Sunday.

He was surrounded by friends who gathered in the warmth of his cozy shed when a vet gave him a shot that stopped a heart that for years had reached out to everyone who drove past his little pasture on Grandview's west edge.

"He looked up at us like he knew we had done everything we could," said a tearful Shirley Phillips, his primary caregiver. "He was at peace. He didn't want to get up anymore.

"Then he sighed a couple of times, and he was gone."

Ebenezer was 33, or thereabouts. He was buried Monday on a snowy hill above a creek that winds through the pasture and woods.

Two years ago, Kansas City rallied to save this old donkey.

Phillips, who drove past on her daily commute, noticed that he looked sick and thin.

She'd seen him for years. Since the mid-1980s, he'd been standing out by the fence, just looking like he had something to say. Perfect strangers pulled over without really knowing why. They'd talk, he'd listen. Then when they'd stop, he'd either give a mild head butt or turn and walk away.

Regulars knew he had more patience if apples and carrots were part of the chat. Children loved to visit.

He loved the train whistle at night, they say. He loved music. When Phillips checked on him in February 2009, he was suffering white-line disease on all his hooves, and his teeth were tearing into his jaw. His weight was down, he wheezed from pneumonia, and he had lost his spunk.

He was dying.

Ebenezer's owner, Ben Alvarado, lived in the Ruskin area. He was 85, landed on Omaha Beach on D-Day and had health problems of his own. His wife, too. They couldn't check on their donkey as often as they would have liked. Nor could they afford high vet bills.

Phillips asked him if she could help, and he agreed.

That's when Kansas City stepped up. A story in The Star led to more than \$10,000 being donated to fix up an old, smelly, dusty donkey.



After three months in an equine clinic, he returned home that April to a new barn. When he climbed out of the trailer, a Grandview police sergeant took his picture.

The donkey trotted that day, happy to be home and feel green grass beneath his hooves again.

Alvarado made it to the homecoming. He always said the donkey had more friends than he did.

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

Last year, when the old fellow got sick again, Phillips and the other caregivers raised money by selling The Ebenezer Calendar. Nearly a thousand were sold at \$17 each. Orders came from around the world.

But this time there would be no donations or calendar. When Phillips and her husband, Randy, drove to check on him late Saturday, she had decided that if he were down, they would have to do something.

“I think he was telling us he didn’t want to get up anymore. He looked at me, and I know he was saying, ‘Shirley, I’m done.’”

She and Randy sat with him that final day. Funny thing, Phillips said, Ebenezer always was great friends with the deer in the woods. They came and stood near the shed in those last hours.

“They knew something was wrong,” Phillips said. “They’re going to miss him.”

Same for everybody who drives down that road and looks toward the fence.