

from our viewpoint...

Veterans deliver effective message

The standing-room-only crowd at Friday’s veterans forum was an effective way to put the Department of Veterans Affairs on notice there should be a community clinic in this area.

Most of the audience of nearly 400 were gray-headed World War II vets, with a smattering of Korea and Vietnam vets, plus many wives, sons and community leaders.

Both Congressman Jerry Moran and Dr. Larry Biro, the Denver regional head of Veterans Affairs health services, said it was the largest meeting of veterans they had seen.

Moran and Biro understood clearly the message the veterans were delivering, and both said the large turnout would add to their efforts to convince the people that an outreach clinic is needed to cover the Tri-State area of northwest Kansas, southwest Nebraska and northeast Colorado.

Moran said it will be a challenge is get the clinic approved and then to find the money within the Veterans Affairs budget to support it.

“Ihear you,” Biro said, “and you can be assured I will be working on this.”

Those were good words to the veterans, but Biro said it would not happen overnight, nor did he think it would be a few months. He said three clinics have been approved and are to be opened in the next year or two, and those come first.

No matter how far in the future a clinic may be, the veterans who attended the forum Friday moved the process forward. They made a statement that something needs to be done to bring services closer to where veterans live.

A clinic is not the only answer to the veterans health issues expressed Friday. Biro and Moran had staff members jotting down issues to be looked into. One veterans said he had asked Congressman Moran’s office about having a Disabled American Veterans van assigned to northwest Kansas, but had not heard more than a nice letter from the congressman.

Moran said he would follow up on the van, which would be another way to help veterans get to the existing service centers — especially with the closing of most of the Greyhound bus stations in the area.

The turnout did was dispel any question about whether there are enough veterans in the area to support a clinic. A veteran from Atwood noted that the World War II veterans are all nearly in their 80s and dying in large numbers.

“If you don’t hurry up with the clinic,” he told Biro, “we won’t need it.”

Biro agreed the rural area had fallen through the cracks, and that a map showing the lack of services made an excellent point. He promised to be an advocate for the rural veterans.

Jay Jolly, administrator of the Goodland Regional Medical Center, noted that the problem may be the way the Veterans Affairs is looking at the question. Rural hospitals could be helping veterans right now, he said.

Ultimately, what would be best for all veterans would be that the Veterans Insurance Card would allow a veteran to go to any doctor, pharmacy or hospital for services. Moran said this would be good for the veterans, and good for rural America.

That is a long way ahead of us, and may never materialize, but with the turnout of veterans Friday, the signal is clear that a clinic should be a top priority for this area.

Those who attended should be talking to any member of Congress they can about the health needs of rural veterans. This will not be a fast process, but everyone who helped bring the veterans out Friday should feel good that the first step has been taken. — *Tom Betz*

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e-mail: star-news@nwkanssas.com

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nwkanssas.com

N.T. Betz, Director of Internet Services

(ntbetz@nwkanssas.com)

Evan Barnum, Systems Admin.(support@nwkanssas.com)

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Medicating animals is pill pushing job

I’m not a doctor, a nurse or even a veterinarian, but I seem to be pushing pills down unwilling throats lately.

Before youngest daughter moved to South Carolina, she asked me to get a couple of tranquilizer pills for her cat, Rupert. Rupert, she said, gets car sick and she really didn’t want to take her on a two-day trip unless she was asleep.

Since Rupert has been to see my veterinarian more times than my pocketbook wants to count, he was willing to prescribe some mild tranquilizers, suggesting that youngest daughter try half a pill first.

I handed over the pills and daughter immediately gave half of one to Rupert. I reminded her that the pills only last about 12 hours and she wasn’t leaving for a week.

She pointed to a big bite on Rupert’s hind-quarters and said that she had decided to see if half a pill was enough. She figured she could get the cat sleepy enough to clean and medicate the wound while checking to see if half a tranquilizer would be enough.

It wasn’t. The cat staggered around a lot but didn’t go to sleep, and she got quite huffy when we tried to snip the fur off from around the bite.

Another half pill, and the cat was still not



**cynthia
haynes**

• open season

happy about the manhandling but she was too sleepy to do much about it. Eventually, she hid in the cat carrier that would be her home for two days on the road.

After medicating Rupert, I decided that might work on my Molly Monster.

For the past couple of years, we have taken the dog Annie and one of our cats on vacation. April Alice travels beautifully. She lays quietly in her carrier for hours on end.

Admittedly, near the end of a 12-hour trip, she starts to cry a little. I would to, if I was trapped in a box without bathroom facilities for 11 or 12 hours.

So the day before vacation, I talked to the vet about pills for Molly.

Molly doesn’t travel well. She fights like crazy as we put her in her carrier for the annual trip to the vet.

When we brought her home from Emporia

Fascinated by humming bird feeding frenzy

I stand there, transfixed.

There is buzzing like the angry sound of bees, and it is the flutter of tiny wings.

Not bees, though.

It’s dusk high in the San Juan Mountains of Colorado, and I’m in the middle of a humming bird feeding frenzy.

With a humming bird’s metabolism, our daughter says, they probably have to eat a lot right before dusk so they can stay warm through the night. That could be true. There is ice on the roof each morning, and soon it will be time for these tiny visitors to head south.

Not tonight, though. For a half hour, dozens of them jockey for position at the four feeding stations on our front porch. I suppose the scene is repeated at houses up and down the Rio Grande.

The newest neighbors down the block have at least half a dozen feeders on their deck, overlooking the river. I wonder if they have this many visitors.

Seldom is there a time when no bird is at the feeder. They flutter in tiny queues, waiting for a



**steve
haynes**

• along the sappa

turn at the perches, or duel in midair, the bigger or bossier bird getting to feed.

Their little dogfights soar to the rafters, then spiral down. Eventually, one of the combatants breaks off, the other gets to eat — if some third party does not have the perch in the meantime.

Their engagements are brief, but spirited. I can hear the clack of their little beaks when they spar. No kidding.

Sometimes, one stops to hover just in front of my face. I’m glad I’m not wearing any red buttons. However, I am wearing safety glasses.

At times, there are more than a dozen little creatures hovering around the feeder at once. They spread their tails and flap those feathers to con-

trol the hover. You can see them operate, though the wings move far too fast for human sight.

There are ruby throats and plain birds, male and female. Goldens, with shimmering green backs. All delicate, fast, furious.

I am not the only one watching. The cat, confined indoors, is in the window, fascinated.

How she would catch one she is not sure, but April Alice is willing to try.

We had a cat once, Midnight, who specialized in humming birds. He would sit under the aspen tree by the hour, just waiting for one to land.

Many made that mistake.

Not today, though. April does not have outdoor privileges.

Eventually, the show ends. Darkness gathers, and the birds apparently head for their perches. One straggler lands and slurps up a last meal.

It won’t be long before they are gone for the winter, but for that half hour, it’s quite a show.

Just ask April.

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garfield

