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## Mayor plays doctor to animals

By LARRY BACON The Register-Guard



*Besides his public duties, Florence Mayor Wilbur Ternyik has his hands full with a playful raccoon named Nanich.*

FLORENCE— When the pressures of local politics start to get to Florence Mayor Wilbur Ternyik, he has a special backyard advisory committee he seeks out.

The composition of the committee changes periodically. Right now, it includes a fawn named Mimi and two baby raccoons named Nanich and Bear.

They're orphans Ternyik and his wife, Joyce, are raising for the state Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The mayor loves animals and says caring for them is a type of therapy.

"The meetings I go to are often tense, and I get all uptight," he says. "But afterward, I can come out here in the yard and sit on the stump. The deer comes along with me, and pretty soon, here comes the raccoon.

“Hey, things settle down in a hurry.”

Mimi, eight weeks old, and 12-week old Nanich frolic together like kittens. Neither is afraid of people. Mimi likes to chew on buttons or loose clothing and loves to be petted.

Nanich—the Chinook Indian word for “examine”—enjoys chewing on shoelaces, playing with a small stuffed raccoon and wrestling and biting anyone willing to put on a leather glove the Ternyiks keep just for that purpose.

When nap time comes, Mimi and Nanich sometimes curl up and fall asleep together. Bear is more of a loner; he was older and wilder when he joined the Ternyiks.

“Nanich doesn’t really know he’s a raccoon yet,” Wilbur says.

Mimi’s mother was killed by a poacher near Deadwood. Joyce says the killing was shortly before or maybe even while the mother was giving birth. She says Mimi was found trailing an umbilical cord near the mother’s body.

Nanich was discovered wandering along Highway 101 north of Florence. Wilbur believes he fell down a steep embankment and was separated from his mother. Bear’s mother was run over by a car.

For about four years, the Ternyiks have had a fish and wildlife permit that allows them to care for game animals. Before becoming licensed, they were providing such care unofficially for at least a decade, with the knowledge of local game officers.

They usually pick up sick, injured or orphaned animals as a result of citizen’s calls to local police.

Injured hawks and owls are probably the most frequent guests at what the Ternyiks call their “short-stay halfway house.” But they also have provided care for turtles, crows, bear cubs, bobcats, possums and even an eagle. And yes, Wilbur says he has City Council permission to keep the animals in his back yard.

The Ternyiks receive no pay for their efforts but say the experience of caring for the animals is worth the effort and expense. Wilbur’s mayoral duties and his sand dunes stabilization and wetlands restoration business keep him very busy, so Joyce does most of the work with the animals.

She has raised five children and has nine grandchildren and says a lot of the skills she learned as a mother are useful in handling the animals. These skills include keeping feeding schedules and burping the young animals after their bottles. And knowing what to do when they are sick.

Her latest patients were a pair of sickly baby pine squirrels. “You sit in the rocking chair holding a squirrel,” she says. “You let him hear your heart beat, try to keep him warm, coax him to eat. The hard part is when they don’t survive.”

Both squirrels died, despite her efforts. Wilbur estimates about half the animals that come to them don’t survive.

The Ternyiks have received help and advice from local veterinarians in caring for the animals and work closely with Dave Siddon, who operates a nationally known wildlife rehabilitation center near Grants Pass.

The Ternyik back yard is small and there is not room for larger animals. After providing some initial care, they usually deliver large or badly injured animals to Siddon.

Mimi will soon go to Siddon’s Wildlife Images center to become part of a “class” of 18 fawns to be weaned of human contact and taught how to survive in the wild.

When Nanich and Bear reach about 20 pounds each, Wilbur will release them into the wild. He's already walking them along streams and getting them familiar with the foods and environment they will encounter in the woods.

He says he has been attracted to animals since he was a child and remembers making pets of a series of wild animals ranging from muskrats to a blue heron when he was growing up on his grandfather's farm in Warrenton. He used to be an avid hunter and trapper but says he is no longer comfortable killing animals.

Sometimes he grows so attached to the animals he and Joyce care for that it's hard to set them free. Wilbur remembers going back into the woods two days after releasing a favorite raccoon named Patty. He was worried about her, afraid she might have been eaten by a cougar.

He put out her former cage, stocked it with grapes, and began calling her name. "Pretty soon there she was, right under my feet," he says. Patty came home with him for a few days and he released her again.

He remembers nursing an injured red hawk to health, taking it out to release it, then watching it crash-land time after time as it tried to fly.

The bird was obviously healthy, and Wilbur called Siddon for advice. Siddon asked how much it was eating. "He told me we had him over his flight weight," Wilbur says. "He was too fat to fly."

The bird went on a diet, and eventually earned its wings.

Wilbur's most painful memory is of a loon that crash-landed on a road during a storm, apparently thinking the wet reflective surface was a stream. The loon's chest was badly injured.

"I stayed up all night with it, and it talked to me all night long," Wilbur remembers. "It died the next day."