

WILDLIFE VET STARTS NEW CARE FACILITY

Posted: December 5, 2015

By VAL VAN METER
The Winchester Star



Belinda Burwell

MILLWOOD — Veterinarian Belinda Burwell, founder and former director of the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center here, is again rehabilitating wild animals at a new outfit she created called Wildlife Veterinary Care.

Burwell, who started the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center 15 years ago, stepped down as its executive director last year, but remained on an interim basis until David Bancroft was hired this spring.

Burwell continued to serve as the center's veterinarian and on its board of directors until September, when Burwell says that Bancroft banned her from the facility.

A month later, the board of directors removed her from the governing board of trustees.

"It just came out of the blue," Burwell said recently. But "people were still calling me" about injured animals.

She said there are about 400 certified wildlife rehabilitators in Virginia. There are some in Warren and Frederick counties, but she is the only one in Clarke.

"The animals still need help," Burwell said.

With that in mind, she decided to start another organization, which can accept gifts and supplies.

And that organization is Wildlife Veterinary Care.

Burwell had been fundraising for a more than 8,000-square-foot facility she designed for Blue Ridge Wildlife Center to replace a 800-square-foot cottage hospital. Now she's back to using space in her home, an attached garage and a barn to care for her wildlife patients.

Her most recent rescue, a waterfowl called a grebe, took its residence in her bathtub until it could be released.

Grebes, she said, can only take flight from water and sometimes mistake wet black pavement as a water surface and crash into it.

Even if not seriously hurt by the landing, they can't get airborne again.

The one she rescued, she said, was found on Valley Avenue in Winchester.

Burwell is also working several days a week for veterinarian Thomas Leahy at the Roseville Veterinary Clinic in Boyce. She worked with him when she first came to the area in 1996.

"I love to take care of pets," Burwell said. "You can cuddle them and love them, and they love you back. You can't do that with wildlife," she added, since the goal is to return them to the wild.

She said Leahy allows her to use his surgical and X-ray equipment for her wildlife patients, just as he did when she was with the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center.

"We couldn't have done it without him. He loves wildlife. He helps when he can," Burwell said.

Few veterinarians make wildlife a specialty, Burwell said, because there aren't many jobs available in that field.

"Lots of rehabilitation centers don't have an on-site vet. That's what made us special" at the center, she said.

Burwell had hoped that when the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center got its larger building, more veterinarians could be trained there to handle the particular issues faced by wildlife.

Burwell said she's now working to transform stalls in her barn into cages for larger birds and animals.

She's collecting funds for wood and wire in addition to medicines and supplies. "People have been so generous," she said.

She called her separation from Blue Ridge Wildlife very sad, and said the entire affair was "very stressful."

She said she is very thankful to the people who contacted her and supported her during the turbulent affair.

"They saved my life," she said. "They were wonderful."

Now, she said, "It's nice to be back doing what I like doing."

For more information, contact Burwell at wildlifevetcare.com. Tax-deductible donations can be sent to P.O. Box 288, Millwood, VA 22646.

— Contact Val Van Meter at vvanmeter@winchesterstar.com