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The Marine Mammal Center Receives New Rescue Containers Built By San Quentin Inmates

Two facilities help one another to achieve mutual goal – rehabilitation

(SAUSALITO, Calif. – June 3, 2005) The Marine Mammal Center is to receive the first of three metal carriers that will be used to transport large sea lions and elephant seals in need of help. The carriers, made out of aluminum sheet metal and weighing 146 pounds each, were designed and built by inmate-students at San Quentin’s machine shop. The carrier project marks a beneficial relationship between The Center and San Quentin’s education department. Designed for rescuing and rehabilitating marine mammals, The Marine Mammal Center will use the carriers next week as part of the release of a rehabilitated sea lion patient at Rodeo Beach in Sausalito. For San Quentin, the carrier project has helped students in the prison’s sheet and machine metal classes learn valuable trade skills that they can use once they’re released back into society.

“We asked San Quentin if they could help us out in making these carriers, and they said yes if in turn we could help them out with a much-needed welding machine,” said Shelbi Stoudt, Stranding Manager at The Marine Mammal Center. “So, we acquired one for the prison machine shop, and the students there, under the direction of instructor Richard Saenz, used it to build the carriers to our specifications. They also improved the original design of the carriers, using computer software donated to them by Autodesk. “

Each carrier would normally cost The Marine Mammal Center \$3000 to have built, but by enlisting San Quentin’s machine shop class, The Center will save \$1000 on each one. Volunteers and staff are preparing for the busy California sea lion rescue season between the months of June and September. In 2004, The Center rescued more than 450 sea lions alone. Many of those patients weighed upwards of 300 pounds. The new San Quentin-produced carriers will replace old ones that have fallen apart over the years and are no longer sturdy to transport patients for rescues, and for releases of healthy patients back to the ocean.

“We’re thrilled to build the carriers for The Marine Mammal Center because we know that without the transports, volunteers and staff could not rescue larger, critically ill animals, said Richard Saenz, Machine Shop Instructor at San Quentin’s Education Department. “My students feel good building something worthwhile to be used outside of the prison; it gives them a sense of purpose.”

The new carrier will be used for the first time to transport White Russian, a California sea lion patient, down to Rodeo Beach from the hospital in Sausalito, on June 7. The adult, female pinniped was rescued from a beach in San Luis Obispo in April suffering from a potentially lethal algal bloom poisoning known as domoic acid toxicity. She’ll be outfitted with a satellite transmitter so researchers from Moss Landing Marine Labs can monitor her travel patterns.

Celebrating its 30th year in 2005, The Marine Mammal Center is a nonprofit hospital dedicated to the rescue and rehabilitation of ill and injured marine mammals, and to research about their health and diseases. Volunteers and staff have treated more than 10,000 California sea lions, elephant seals, porpoises, and other marine life, along 600 miles of coastline from Mendocino County to San Luis Obispo County. In fact, The Center treats more marine mammals than any other institution of its kind in the world, uniquely combining its rehabilitation program with scientific discovery and education programs to advance the understanding of marine mammal health, ocean health and conservation.

On the Web: www.marinemammalcenter.org