

TURTLE DAY: Group's goal is to return 'Beaufort' to the wild

FROM PAGE 1A

to see the turtle up close. "And now it's starting to heal up, and they took all the screws out," she said. Those white places on Beaufort's back are where he's starting to get well.

"It's kind of soft now," Howard said.

"But once it gets nice and hard, we'll let him go out into the ocean, and he can swim with all the other sea turtles out there."

Also accompanying Beaufort was center director Jean Beasley, who founded the sea turtle hospital in memory of her daughter, an organizer of the Topsail Turtle Project who died of cancer more than a decade ago.

Karen Beasley's insurance money was used as seed money to build the center, which has released more than 130 rescued and rehabilitated sea turtles since its founding in 1997.

Beaufort, estimated to be between 5 to 8 years old and weighing about 30 pounds, traveled down to Ocean Isle in a special tub in the back of a small, enclosed truck. His entourage also brought a number of big buckets of sea

water, which were poured into Beaufort's pool while he visited briefly at the museum.

Beaufort should be ready to return to the ocean later this fall or sometime next spring, Howard said.

"Even though he looks like a pet here with us now, he's not a pet," center volunteer Brad Davis said as Beaufort moved freely around in the water inside his portable pool, to the delight of dozens of turtle aficionados who got a chance to look but not touch.

"As much as we'd love to pet him and stuff, we don't want him to get used to us," Davis said.

The goal, Davis said, is to let Beaufort return to being "wild and free back into the ocean."

Visitors also were given cards with the center's website address (<http://www.seaturtlehospital.org>) so they can view photos of Beaufort and other sea turtles currently undergoing rehabilitation.

"He's amazing," Davis said of the rapidly recovering turtle. "He makes the sad ones not as difficult when you see a successful one like this."



STAFF PHOTO BY LAURA LEWIS

Beth Howard, left, a volunteer at the Karen Beasley Sea Turtle Rescue & Rehabilitation Center in Topsail Beach, assists with Beaufort, a rescued loggerhead injured by a boat propeller, while center founder Jean Beasley gives the sea turtle a cooling down from a hose during the turtle's visit to Ocean Isle.

Recovering turtle visits Ocean Isle

BY LAURA LEWIS
STAFF WRITER

For a turtle, Beaufort is bouncing back fast.

The loggerhead, who paid a celebrity visit during Turtle Day festivities Monday at the Museum of Coastal Carolina, is among 20 rescued sea turtles who are currently patients at the Karen Beasley Sea Turtle Rescue & Rehabilitation Center in Topsail Beach.

Beaufort, named for the seaside town in North Carolina where he was rescued, was brought to the center last December with massive boat-propeller injuries on his shell.

"You see that big cut on his back?" center volunteer Beth Howard asked, speak-

ing to a group of children gathered around Beaufort's traveling plastic pool.

"It looks really good now, but when he first came to us his back was just crackling," Howard said. "The doctors really didn't think he'd live through the night."

After undergoing "carapace repair" at the North Carolina State School of Veterinary Medicine, involving surgical steel plates and screws to hold his broken shell together, Beaufort has proven to be a speedy turtle when it comes to recovery.

"They screwed him together so it would heal up like a big ol' Band-Aid," Howard told visitors of all ages who waited their turn