

# First Responders learn about marine animal rescue

By Michaela Kennedy

Recognizing the difference between distress and rest can mean the difference between being a life-saving Samaritan and an annoying intruder for marine animals. A training program from Mystic Aquarium teaches volunteers how to recognize vital signs and behavior in order to help the aquarium's Marine Mammal Stranding Team.

Mystic Aquarium's "First Responders for Stranded Animals" seminar came to the library last Thursday, Nov. 8. Presented by The Friends of the Jamestown Library, the training session included a slide show of various regional animal species and their defining characteristics. Almost 30 participants showed up to learn about the rescue program.

Cindy Davis of Mystic Aquarium listed signs that tell if an animal is sick or injured, and warned against approaching any wild mammal. "Stress starts before an animal is stranded," she explained. Stress elevates when humans go near or gather to stare. "Think about what is humane," she added.

First Responders must be at least 18 years of age, live along the Southern New England coastline and be willing to drive to respond to calls in their area, Davis said. The volunteers must also attend one of the aquarium's workshops that will qualify them to respond to initial stranded marine animal calls. Not all animals that are lying on a shoreline need help, however.

First Responders never touch the animals. Participants are trained

to identify common species of marine animals and sea turtles, and are taught signs of physical and stress-related health issues. The helpers then contact the aquarium with information they gather so staff members can decide the proper response. "We don't go out and snap up these animals in the water," Davis emphasized.

First Responders cut response time for a sick or injured seal to be brought in, or allow a healthy seal to rest on the beach while the public is educated about why the seal is there. While at the scene, they can hand out species identification brochures and educate others about what they can do to help. No sea lions live on the East Coast, but a variety of seals, whales and sea turtles can be identified, Davis

noted.

Davis continued that the aquarium can house up to 10 seals. If an animal is seriously sick, putting it into a pool of water can tire it more. "We provide mist and water bowls. We'll even turn on heaters, if necessary," she added. Radio graphs allow the staff to see if the patient has internal problems, such as rocks or shells in the stomach. Operations are rarely performed, if at all, but sometimes euthanasia is an important alternative if the animal's condition is hopelessly severe.

Davis also noted that animals brought in are not named, but given an identification number. "It prevents people from becoming attached," she explained. To keep the animals from becoming

attached as well, staffers feed patients from the back door to keep the food source secret. "We don't want them approaching fishermen or other boats," she added.

The First Responders network currently has about 300 members. Davis said the aquarium continues to recruit more members since volunteers often are working or not available for other reasons. "Don't be frustrated if we don't call you right away," she encouraged.

At least half of the participants that evening filled out application forms to join the certification course for first responders. For more information or to get a form, go online to [www.mysticaquarium.org](http://www.mysticaquarium.org), or call 860-572-5955, ext. 520.

## Craft show coming Dec. 1

Jamestown's annual Holiday Craft Show, sponsored by the Conanicut Island Art Association (CIAA), will be held on Saturday, Dec. 1, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., at the Melrose Avenue School, 76 Melrose Ave.

This very popular show features a variety of handmade items, including the work of artisans from Jamestown and surrounding communities. People will enjoy finding many unique and affordable gifts, including children's clothing, jewelry, fine ceramic art, pens, knitwear, note cards, artwork, photographs, and quilts. Many crafters produce special items for customers who return year after year. This year's show manager is Deborah Goyette.

Several non-profit organizations will also offer items for their fundraising efforts. The Jamestown PTO will be selling food all day from the school's cafeteria.

Plan to enjoy a few hours of fun shopping, along with a break for coffee, lunch, or a snack. Proceeds from the show help support the CIAA's scholarship grant programs for elementary school students and high school seniors. Call 423-1231 for more information.

## Chiropractor relocates office

Dr. Alan R. Post, founder and director of the Newport Alternative Health Center, has relocated his North Kingstown office to 1130 Ten Rod Rd., "The Meadows," also in North Kingstown.

Dr. Post can be reached at 294-9550 or [dr.alanpost@verizon.net](mailto:dr.alanpost@verizon.net).

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