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Rehabbing The Rehab. Center

Marine Life Center Takes Ambitious Track For Future

By DAVID A. FONSECA

The construction of a new hospital large enough to house turtles, seals, dolphins, and even whales is only the first step in the remodeling and refurbishing

of the National Marine Life Center, Director Kathryn A. Zagzebski said this week.

Standing in the center's gift shop and learning center, which doubles as the center's hospital

while the new one is constructed, Ms. Zagzebski said the new hospital should be completed by October and in time for sea turtle stranding season.

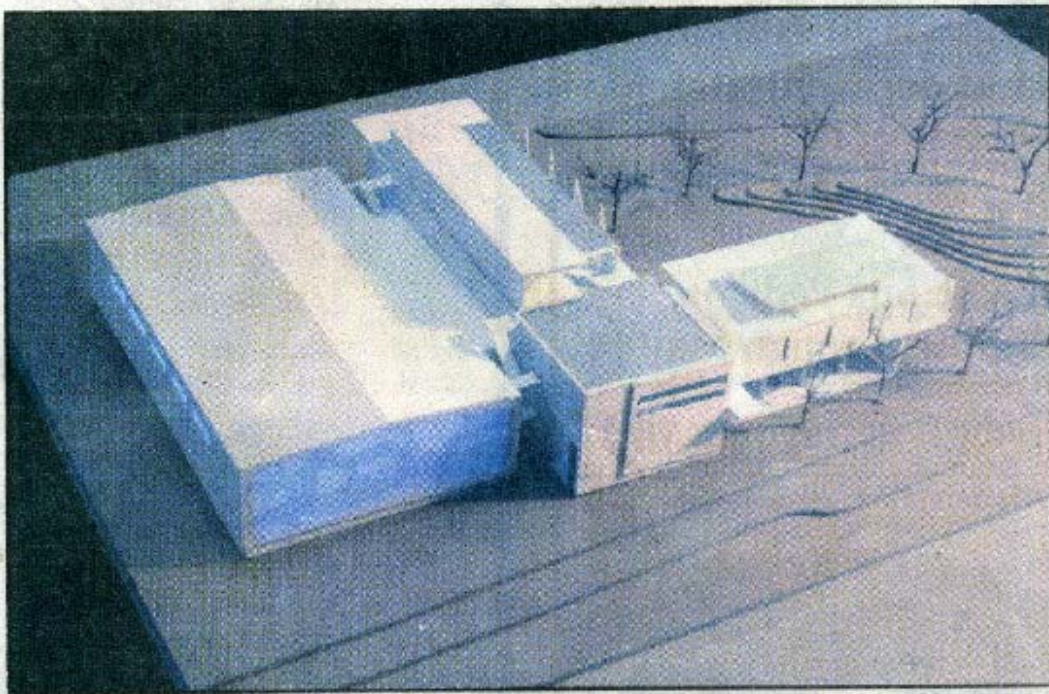
The National Marine Life Center is one of only three marine animal hospitals in Massachusetts; the others are Woods Hole Marine Mammal Center and the New England Aquarium in Boston.

When the new hospital is complete, she said, the NMLC will be able to take in between 30 and 40 stranded sea turtles per season.

But, there are bigger plans beyond that, she said. In addition to being a hot spot for sea turtle strandings, Cape Cod's shores have had between 80 and 120 live dolphins and porpoises and whales wash ashore each year between 2005 and 2007.

About 80 live seals have also stranded on the Cape's beaches each year in that time.

Once the grant-funded \$1.5 million hospital is completed, the NMLC hopes to invest another \$1.5 million to expand it so it



COURTESY OF NATIONAL MARINE LIFE CENTER

A three-dimensional rendering of plans for a fully renovated and remodeled National Marine Life Center. The center's new hospital is scheduled to be completed in October, said NMLC Director Kathy Zagzebski, but the full realization of the project will depend on continued fundraising.

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can serve to rehabilitate the full host of marine life that strands on Cape Cod each year.

Once completed, the hospital will contain a sea turtle ward consisting of the center's current tanks and life support systems, as well as an underground seal pool and a dolphin and small whale pool, both of which will also have their own life support systems.

The completed hospital will feature a mezzanine level, science lab, library, staff and volunteer offices, and conference rooms.

The hospital will receive fresh seawater from the NMLC's recently completed pump house.

Ms. Zagzebski said the pump house is referred to as the center's overall life support system, as it provides the fresh, clean seawater the stranded marine mammals need to survive.

While the primary goal of the NMLC is marine mammal rehabilitation, Ms. Zagzebski said its remodeling will also be tailored to suit two of its auxiliary goals, that of providing educational opportunities and attracting tourists to downtown Buzzards Bay.

The outside wall of the hospital will be made of a translucent polycarbonate material that will change hue with the rising and setting of the sun.

She hopes that in addition to providing a more familiar and comfortable setting for the animals in the hospital, the facility will add a nice touch to the revitalization of downtown.

Ms. Zagzebski said a longer-term remodeling of the NMLC's learning center is also planned. Designed by Cosestudi LLC of Rochester, the plans include a 70-seat auditorium, a book store and café, exhibit space, educa-

tion center and classrooms, conference rooms and event facilities, and administrative offices.

Ms. Zagzebski also hopes to relocate parking for the center from the right-hand side of its offices to the rear, next to the pump house. The old parking lot would then be converted to a courtyard area, she said.

The construction of a new learning center would cost about \$4 million, Ms. Zagzebski said.

Ms. Zagzebski admitted that projects like the one the NMLC has embarked on take time, especially for nonprofit groups that rely on dona-

tions and grants for funding.

The money for the pump house was received through a federal grant secured from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, secured with the help of Congressman William D. Delahunt and Senators John Kerry and Edward Kennedy in 2003, for example.

However, as she examined a scale model of what the center would look like once completed, Ms. Zagzebski seemed undeterred by the amount of work it would take to fulfill the vision. In the center's entrance, four small aquariums each held a

diamond-back terrapin. The

threatened species of turtles were almost eaten out of extinction during the 1920s and their habitat is now under attack by real estate development, were being nursed back to health by volunteers so they could be reintroduced to the wild—one day at a time, not unlike the rehabilitation of the marine life center.

"It is ambitious," she admitted. "But by breaking it down into chunks, we feel like we can get it done. I really am excited about what this can do for the community."