

VOLUNTEER HIGHLIGHT – CARYN PATCH

Eleven years ago Caryn Patch walked through the doors of our red barn looking for a volunteer opportunity. At that time we had no idea what an extraordinary person was stepping into our lives. Through the years Caryn has developed into a capable team leader, a supportive mentor, and a “Charlie’s Angels” style marine mammal rescuer! We can always depend on Caryn to pitch in wherever we need help. Not only will she volunteer for extra shifts or late night feedings in animal care, she dedicates many hours to our Fundraising Committee and is always willing to lend a hand with paperwork that needs to be completed.

Debbie MacCarter, a member of Caryn’s animal care crew, shares the story of her experience working with Caryn over the years. Debbie’s story truly illustrates the impact that Caryn has had on her fellow volunteers and the Center, and what she means to us all.



Caryn (right) with Michele Hunter, Director of Operations/Animal Care, and Sammie the Sea Lion

“My first attempt at restraining a small sea lion for a tube feeding was, in my opinion, a complete disaster. I never would have thought that a sick, underweight pup could be so skillful at avoiding my every attempt to wrap a bath-sized towel around its head. My confidence diminished with each comedic attempt I made chasing the sea lion around the small pen. I finally managed to restrain the pup and the rest of the experience is a distant memory. I’ll never forget the heart-sinking feeling that I just wasn’t cut out for this.

The week following my “sea lion restraining escapade,” Caryn, who had been volunteering on the Sunday shift, switched to the Saturday afternoon shift. It was the beginning of our busy season and there were plenty of little pups that needed to be restrained for tube feedings. Caryn had not witnessed my embarrassing romp with the sea lion. It was like getting a fresh start. The slate was wiped clean... or maybe, she had heard about my previous attempt, and was just too kind to make fun. “I’m going to help you with restraining techniques,” she told me, “but first we’re going upstairs to train on Seymour.” I soon found out that Seymour was a slightly tattered stuffed sea lion about the size of an average pup. Caryn methodically went through each step, cracking a joke here and there to lighten the mood and put me at ease. Her gentle manner, unwavering patience, and encouraging words boosted my confidence to an all time high. She made me feel like I could do anything. Now it was time to try my newly acquired skills on a real sea lion. I remember struggling a little with my approach, but Caryn was right there by my side coaching me every step of the way. In no time, I’d executed a near perfect restraint for a tube feeding. I felt proud and began to think I might be cut out for this after all. I believe I would have struggled much longer with perfecting the art of restraining without Caryn’s guidance, encouraging words, and touch of humor that day. Caryn seemed to know that I, as a new volunteer, needed a little help to overcome this first hurdle.

Over the years, I’ve observed, listened to, and learned so many things from Caryn: how to strategize and coordinate a rescue; how to cunningly exit a pen full of escape-focused sea lion pups; how to recover a lost prime on the pool pumps without panicking; and how to laugh and keep smiling through the crazy and hectic busy season. I truly believe that the opportunity to work beside Caryn all these years has made me into the volunteer I am today. In my years ahead volunteering at PMMC, I always want Caryn on my team and by my side.”

Thank you Caryn for your unselfish commitment and dedication! The amount of time and energy you have given to the Center and its patients over the years is admirable and very much appreciated.

