FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sea Lions for Service Members

Program at PMMC to engage veterans in rescue and rehabilitation work.

Laguna Beach, CA Wednesday, June 12, 2019 - Pacific Marine Mammal Center (PMMC) continues to expand its reach in the community with the growing Sea Lions for Service Members (SLSM) program. This is a special and free program, started in 2017, that brings recently returned veterans to PMMC to engage in a therapeutic experience using the backdrop of the center's marine mammal rescue and rehabilitation work. The goal of the education, hands-on activities, and observations that take place during the 3-hour program is to provide the opportunity to relate to the animals, which can ultimately create an association of healing that service members in need can identify with. Specifically, seeing the struggles of animals that are fighting health issues and helping with their transition from rehabilitation to recovery and the return to a normal life at sea can provide a sense of hope that our military warriors can draw upon, which leads to the realization they can accomplish the same.

PMMC recently ran a program on March 30th in partnership with Team Rubicon, a disaster relief nonprofit organization based in Los Angeles that primarily utilizes military veterans as their workforce. Team Rubicon brought together two (2) veterans from different backgrounds that PMMC was honored to work with - James, a USAF retired firefighter; and Naomi, an Army veteran who served 5 years in Germany, Kosovo and Iraq.

Colby Hollabaugh, a former Marine and current PMMC animal care and education volunteer, ran the program that touched off with understanding the animals' integration to PMMC, which is a very foreign environment. They assisted in making fish "smoothies" that are used in tube feedings for our more critically sick animals, and the preparation of precisely weighed-out and custom fish meals that each patient gets according to their rehabilitation progress. Participants also cleaned animal pens and husbandry equipment, among other animal care tasks. The program culminates with the service members attending a patient release of the healthy animals going back into the wild.

"I just wanted to thank you both for what you do with the sea lions and service you provide for service men/women," said Naomi about the program. "After reflecting on the experience, it brought back lots of memories of my experience in the military. More importantly it made me reminisce where I have been and where I am now."

The March 30 program was additionally unique in that James has since continued to stay on with PMMC and is now part of our animal care team on Tuesday afternoons.

"The Pacific Marine Mammal Center has given veterans a chance to intermingle with the rescued seals and sea lions and I had the opportunity to do just that, what an experience," said James. "The few hours we spent feeding and cleaning up after these precious animals brought back memories of when I was active duty. Team work and dedication provide comfort and rehabilitation for the animals. The staff and volunteers are professional and genuine and I'm proud to say that I'm now a permanent volunteer at the center. Sometimes in life a person should feel compelled to give back, and I'm
at the center. Sometimes in life a person should feel compelled to give back, and I’m doing just that.”

The entire program was captured on film by budding filmmaker, Jonathen Davis, also part of Team Rubicon and U.S. Navy Veteran. Since leaving the military, Jonathon became an ocean steward by bringing awareness about marine and ocean life through film.

“Seeing both my worlds come together in this SLSM program, I am excited to effectively tell the story about this program in a video story,” said Jonathen. He went on to express that the program was excellent for those transitioning from active duty to civilian life as it provided a new purpose on which to focus.

PMMC has since had another SLSM Program on May 29, with a group of blind veterans in partnership with the Long Beach Blind Rehabilitation Center. Eight veterans participated in an adapted program focusing on rehabilitation, descriptions, animal sounds and the touch of artifacts.

For more information about SLSM, please reach out to PMMC Education Director, Kirsten Donald at kdonald@pacificmmc.org.

Sea Lions for Service Members Narrated by Jonathen E. Davis

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About Pacific Marine Mammal Center

The Pacific Marine Mammal Center rescues, rehabilitates and releases marine mammals and inspires ocean stewardship through research, education and collaboration. Pacific Marine Mammal Center is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization. Our Tax-ID number is: 95-3680896

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