

A Trip Worth Reporting: Rescue of a Baby Manatee

April 5, 2018

Port Salerno, Florida

by Tom Christensen

Donna Christensen (TSRA Member and spouse of Tom) was on the Schooner Oaks Community beach visiting with neighbors and family. They were alerted by a family playing on the neighboring Twin Rivers Park beach that a small baby manatee was in the water and, most importantly, both mama and baby manatee seemed to be in distress. The baby was not able to keep up with its mother and had lesions on its skin.

The neighbor's daughter and Donna both began calling wildlife organizations and agencies in the area to see what could be done to help the baby manatee. They were successful in contacting staff with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Manatee Rescue Team, who dispatched a rescue technician and rescue van to Twin Rivers Park. The rescue team coordinator asked if Tom Christensen could have a kayak with rescue gear ready to assist in the rescue of the baby manatee as well as be the standby water rescue safety swimmer.

The family gave the baby manatee to the wildlife technician who held the manatee until the rescue van arrived. Tom was ready with his TSRA water rescue training (thanks to Charlie and Woody) and kept the technician and manatee safe in surging waters.



Florida wildlife technician with baby manatee

The dad, Tom and others helped load the baby into a big water filled tub and load the tub into the manatee rescue van, which then headed to the manatee rescue nursery at the Miami Seaquarium.

Aquarium staff shared that the baby was born prematurely, its eyes were not fully developed and it could not nurse on its mama. They said it was about a week old and would have died in the next two days without intervention. They also shared that there have been 13 manatee baby rescues in the last 30 days, many in Schooner Oaks area, which is a manatee calving ground this time of year.



Manatee Rescue Team van

Note: TSRA Instructor Tom Christensen is in Port Salerno, FL teaching kayaking to all the snowbirds this winter. He reports all the snow up north this winter produced a bumper crop of retirees who want to paddle! He will be back in Tennessee in early May to begin Intro to Kayaking classes in May and June.

April 24, 2018 Update: Seaquarium staff say that the 30 pound, three feet long male calf, whom they've named Rocky Road, is the smallest manatee ever received for rehabilitation at the aquarium. Rocky Road has been receiving around-the-clock care and bottle feeding. If he survives, he'll be released near the rescue site once he's big enough. Rocky Road's story is not just TSRA news! He's featured on the [Orlando Sentinel](#) website and on the [Miami Seaquarium Facebook page](#).