

HISTORY OF THE N.E.S.T. REHAB FACILITY

From a Dream to Reality

The rehabilitation building was looking dreary inside. The gray epoxy paint was probably nice when it had been applied 15 years ago, but now it just looked tired. A few volunteers decided to freshen it up with a good cleaning and some bright new blue and white paint. While the work was being accomplished, the volunteers began to wonder how [N.E.S.T.](#) acquired the building, which is located behind North Carolina Aquarium on Roanoke Island (NCARI), and all the equipment. So...who better to ask than **Millie Overman**, *the founder and first president of N.E.S.T.*



Millie Overman, founder and first president of N.E.S.T.

Always gracious, and willing to do anything that would help the turtles, Millie readily gave some of her time to explain how the rehab came into existence. In the fall of 1995 someone reported a dead loggerhead on the beaches in Corolla. [N.E.S.T.](#) volunteers found the turtle to be alive but very ill. After learning that NCARI had no facilities for the sick loggerhead, the search began to find a rehabilitation facility for him/her. With a fond smile, Millie recalled the trip she took to Sea World in Orlando, Florida with the loggerhead. While spending two days there, she learned how much work and expense went into the care and feeding of a sick or injured turtle. “Caroline” was treated for a fishhook injury, infection and pneumonia. In April, 1996, she was transported from Orlando to Ocracoke for release. Millie credits Ray Davis, the head of rehabilitation at Sea World at that time, with helping [N.E.S.T.](#) prove that a turtle could be successfully rehabbed and released.

Millie went on to explain: In the beginning, the turtles were rehabbed in people’s homes in bathtubs or “East Coast Soft Spas” in their living rooms. [N.E.S.T.](#) volunteers realized that a facility was needed and that the NCARI would be an ideal location. An area that was enclosed by lattice work was soon to become the home of [N.E.S.T.](#)’s Rehab facility. There were about 10 volunteers who came before and after work, and any time their busy schedules allowed. She recalls mixing their own saltwater and pumping it from one tank to another. They worked under tarps hung over the latticework and in the winter used individual electric heaters to keep the turtles warm. It sounds very primitive now, but at the time, they were happy to have the space. Soon a more permanent arrangement became a fact. Funding (always a problem) was obtained through a \$5000 grant from the Outer Banks Community Foundation and lots and lots of individual donations to [N.E.S.T.](#) Local contractor John Miller contributed his expertise, time, and some of the supplies, helping this dream become a reality only two years after the formation of [N.E.S.T.](#)



Millie working with N.E.S.T. volunteers

PHOTO BY JACKIE ORSULAK

Millie reminds everyone that [N.E.S.T.](#)’s goal is “to get the turtles healthy so they can be released.” She agrees that [N.E.S.T.](#) sitting and making sure the hatchlings get to the ocean is great. However, she adds, “rehabbing those older turtles that will be laying their eggs in just a few years is the most important thing we do.”

Now 15+ years older and with a fresh coat of paint, the [N.E.S.T.](#) Rehab Facility provides a place for [N.E.S.T.](#) volunteers to continue the work those first volunteers began. Thanks to Millie and all those who had this vision, the volunteers have a place to help rehab sea turtles, allowing them to be released back to the ocean in good health.