

# Goat Island artist aids turtles after her recovery from surgery

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Sarah Sanders has a tough shell. Less than two weeks after brain surgery to remove a benign tumor, the Goat Island resident returned to her beloved wood shop and began a new project.

With her health back, Sanders wanted to help some real shelled creatures. She started building handcrafted boxes to benefit the S.C. Aquarium Sea Turtle Rescue.

Two hundred seaweed green boxes, flecked with gold paint and topped with turtle finials, go on sale this week at area stores for \$49. All profits, or \$20 a box, will go toward helping injured sea turtles receive treatment, with the goal of release.

Sanders moved to Goat Island in 1969 and was among the first to live full time on the island. She must carry everything across the water to and from her home.

Navigating across the Intracoastal Waterway, she moves without hesitation, clambering on and off her boat.

She retired about 10 years ago from teaching and coaching, and an authoritative power remains in her engaging, dark eyes.

About four years ago, Sanders tried her hand at decorative boxes using castoffs from a friend's framing work.

"I hate to see anything thrown away," she said.

About six weeks ago, Sanders awoke at 3 a.m. with a terrible headache. After a sleepless night, she called a friend, who urged Sanders to get into her boat and go to the doctor.

Sanders' doctor admitted her to a hospital at once. She had a benign tumor the size of a lemon in the back of her brain.

"There was so much pain," she said. "I wasn't afraid to die. I didn't want to be crippled or dependent on anyone."

When friend and business partner Joe Wimberly heard of Sanders' illness, he tried to broker a deal with God. He said, "God, I know you don't make deals, but if you get Sarah well, we've got to do something to give back."

Less than two weeks after surgery and a period recuperating with friends, Sanders eased her way back into making boxes.

"I was like a junkie having a sawdust fix," she said.

The limited-edition boxes are numbered and signed by Sanders. She puts the finishing touches on the boxes in her back room, among the flutter and delicate chirps of her caged finches.

The sea turtle series is called "Under the Sea" and is part of the South Carolina Aquarium's Turtles on the Town fundraising effort.

Sea turtles are taken to the rescue group for a number of reasons: injuries, shock and infections. The average stay of turtles is seven to eight months, and treatments can include medication, X-rays and blood transfusions.

The rescue released its first rehabilitated turtle back into the wild in 2003. Since then, the aquarium has successfully treated and released more than 20 turtles.

Sanders said she cares less about impressing people than doing what she loves.

And right now, that's practicing her craft and making good on a friend's deal with God.

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