

SEAWORLD RELEASES LARGEST MANATEE EVER UNDER ITS CARE

SeaWorld's Animal Rescue Team released Rita, the largest manatee the park has ever cared for, back into nature ... by crane.

The 12-foot-long, 3,000-pound female was released into Blue Springs Thursday, February 26. Due to her immense size, SeaWorld's rescue team had to utilize the heavy piece of machinery to lift and lower her into the spring.

Rita was rescued in 1982 – more than 26 years ago – from the Banana River in Merritt Island because her right pectoral flipper was entangled in a crab trap; the injury forced SeaWorld vets to amputate.

A state-mandated quarantine for the papilloma virus (PV) kept Rita at SeaWorld longer than expected. At the time, wildlife officials feared this virus could be spread to wild manatee populations and it was thought Rita may have been exposed. Recently completed research shows that PV already exists in the wild and provides no threat to wild manatees.

SeaWorld is also releasing Amber, a 9-foot-long, 1,300-pound, female orphan manatee that was rescued from Blue Springs in 2001.

-- SeaWorld --