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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Decatur Morgan Hospital helps Cook Museum with sea turtle care

DECATUR, AL – Kale, the endangered Kemp's ridley sea turtle in the care of Cook Museum of Natural Science, received a computerized tomography (CT) scan Tuesday at Decatur Morgan Hospital.

Dr. Frank Scalfano and Dr. John Owens, members of DMH Medical Staff, physicians with The Radiology Group, P.A., and the DMH Imaging Department were on hand to facilitate.

"We are so glad that we could help Kale and our friends at the Cook Museum," said Decatur Morgan Hospital President Kelli Powers. "Decatur Morgan Hospital is committed to providing state of the art technology to all members of our community. To my knowledge, this was our first turtle patient, and I know our terrific staff in the Imaging Department took great care to make sure Kale had the best experience possible."

Cook Museum Executive Director Scott Mayo reached out to the hospital at the end of June to see if the scan was a possibility, and they quickly found a way to make it happen.

"While we have always known that the people of this community love and are concerned for Kale, the administration, doctors, and staff of Decatur Morgan Hospital have really gone above and beyond!" said Cook Museum Executive Director Scott Mayo. "We are so thankful for their partnership in making this next-level diagnostic care available."

The CT scan is the best tool to assess the absence or presence of continued deep infections in Kale's carapace (part of his shell).

Kale has been at his forever home with the Cook Museum since 2020, but he came off display in January 2022 to address health concerns and was moved to the Museum's off-site facility.

Since that time, the Animal Care staff and the Museum's veterinarian team have spent over 900 man-hours helping Kale recover from an infection. This CT scan is one of the many steps in his return to the Oceans Tank at the Museum.

"Reptiles are well known for being able to heal incredible injuries, but in general it takes them a longer time than warm-blooded animals," according to veterinarian Dr. Christian Keller. "Their temperatures are cooler and they have slower metabolism, so it's been a long time since anyone has been able to see Kale in the Exhibit. We were able to do the CT scan in an attempt to quantify how much more healing has to take place."

Kale is making great progress in his recovery, and the Museum hopes to have him back on display to visitors in the near future.

Kale's Story

Kale came to the Museum from the Virginia Aquarium and Marine Science Center, a facility that rescues and rehabilitates sea turtles and other marine animals so they can be released back into the wild.

Kale, while still a juvenile, was hooked by a recreational fishman off a pier on Chesapeake Bay in Virginia in 2019. Due to the size of the hook, an endoscopic procedure could not remove the hook. Therefore, several invasive surgeries were required.

His wound did not fully heal and created scar tissue and a fistula, a hollow space where food and debris can get trapped and cause infections. Due to the fistula, Kale needs medical attention from time to time, making him a non-releasable sea turtle.