



Gulf of Mexico Program



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Animal Rehabilitation Keep (ARK) of the University of Texas Marine Science Institute Receives Gulf Guardian Award

STENNIS SPACE CENTER, Miss. – The Gulf of Mexico Program recently announced that the Animal Rehabilitation Keep or ARK located at the University of Texas Marine Science Institute in Port Aransas, Texas will receive a Gulf Guardian Award for 2011 in the Civic/Nonprofit Category. The Awards ceremony will be held in conjunction with the Gulf of Mexico Alliance Meeting on August 3, 2011, beginning at 6 p.m. in the Ballroom at the Westin New Orleans Canal Place in New Orleans.

The Animal Rehabilitation Keep (ARK)'s mission is to rescue, rehabilitate and release injured and sick wildlife in the Coastal Bend of Texas. ARK has rescued numerous marine animals, especially sea turtles and large aquatic birds and has educated the public on the hazards of confronting these animals and the human actions and coastal changes that affect their natural habitat. ARK is operated largely by volunteers, utilities supplied by the University of Texas' Marine Science Institute, and donations from the general public. The ARK is the only entity of its kind in the area that rescues animals of all types from baby sparrows to 200-lb sea turtles. Since the early 1980's, the ARK has admitted thousands of birds and sea turtles, hundreds of terrestrial turtles, tortoises, and small mammals and dozens of marine mammals. They maintain detailed records of the animals treated as well as those found deceased. ARK tags all of their turtles with pit tags on release and some with satellite tags and have tracked some turtles for as long as 550 days. Some of the birds are banded with official USFWS bands. ARK volunteers are trained to do daily sea turtle nesting patrols during the nesting season. ARK has made a significant impact to the environment by helping to preserve the survival of important native Gulf species and endangered Gulf species by their rescue efforts. They release those that would not have survived back to the wild and help to maintain and increase populations of important marine species.

The Gulf of Mexico Program initiated the Gulf Guardian awards in 2000 as a way to recognize and honor the businesses, community groups, individuals, and agencies that are taking positive steps to keep the Gulf healthy, beautiful and productive. A first, second, and third place awards are given in seven categories: individual, business, youth environmental education, civic/nonprofit organizations, cultural diversity/environmental justice, partnership and bi-national efforts.

"The Gulf Guardian Award winners demonstrate great examples of collaborative efforts leading to solutions that address the Gulf of Mexico environment," said EPA Regional Administrator Al Armendariz. "Their accomplishments are making a positive difference in protecting and restoring the Gulf and EPA is pleased to recognize their environmental stewardship."

The Gulf of Mexico Program began in 1988 to protect, restore, and maintain the health and productivity of the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem in economically sustainable ways. The Gulf of Mexico Program is underwritten by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and is a non-regulatory, inclusive consortium of state and federal government agencies and representatives of the business and agricultural community, fishing industry, scientists, environmentalists, and community leaders from all five Gulf States. The Gulf Program seeks to improve the environmental health of the Gulf in concert with economic development.

Gloria Car, Acting Director of the Gulf of Mexico Program said, "This is the 11th year of the Gulf Guardian Awards Program, and I am proud to say that each year the winners in all categories have represented the very best of environmental accomplishments in the Gulf of Mexico. The partnership of the Gulf of Mexico Program works to improve the environmental health of the Gulf, and the Gulf Guardian Awards is an important way for us to recognize these valuable efforts. The 2011 award winners truly exemplify the enthusiastic and committed citizens, communities, governments, and businesses who address complex problems to improve, protect, and sustain our regional and national treasure, the Gulf of Mexico.

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Editor's Note: For more information about the Gulf Guardian Awards and the Gulf of Mexico Program, call the Gulf of Mexico Program Office at 228-688-3726 or visit our web site at <http://www.epa.gov/gmpo>.