

## Bellingham Resident Helps Save Oiled Birds along the Gulf Coast

ISABELLE DILLS

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Bellingham resident Mike Massey was preparing to wash the oil from a Laughing gull when he heard the leaking Gulf oil well had been capped Thursday, July 15.

Massey, who has worked with a bird rescue center since early July, said the news made him choke up.

"The struggle to make things better can get a little intense, especially here," said Massey, who is currently working at an oiled wildlife rehabilitation center in Gulfport, Miss. "No creature should ever be so contaminated that you have to suit up in Tyvek protective gear to approach it. It just isn't right."

Massey, 47, is a computer networking faculty member at Bellingham Technical College and has volunteered with the Northwest Wildlife Rehabilitation Center for three years. Because he was not teaching this summer, Massey joined the International Bird Rescue Research Center, which offered him a staff position after learning of his bird handling and tube-feeding experience.

The rescue group, based out of northern California, has been working in the Gulf Coast to rescue seabirds after the April 20 explosion on BP's Deepwater Horizon oil rig.

Massey joined the group July 6 and has worked at three intake centers in three different states: Louisiana, Alabama and Mississippi. The center in Fort Jackson, La., was the biggest by far, Massey said.

"It has high security, sandy grounds, swampy heat, media visits and helicopters nearby," he said. "It reminds people of a UFO crash site or a Vietnam War movie."

He and the team he works with came from all over the country to help. They work 12- to 14-hour days - without days off - in the sweltering summer heat taking care of the birds.

To clean the birds, the International Bird Rescue Research Center uses Dawn dishwashing liquid, according to the group's website. Dawn meets all of the criteria established by the rescue center including the ability to remove most oils, being non-irritating to the skin and eyes and having rapid removal from feathers, according to the website.



Once the birds are rehabilitated, they are released into clean and oil-free areas chosen by federal and state agency personnel. If the area they were captured in is still oiled, then the birds are transported to more remote locations.

Massey's wife, Kate, described her husband as "an adventuresome type" who takes his summers off "very seriously." One summer, he participated in a marathon kayak race.

"(Working with the rescue center) will be this summer's adventure," she said

Massey, who plans to return home in early August, said he has helped care for dozens of birds, mostly pelicans and gulls but also spoonbills, gannets and skimmers.

"Some of the birds arrive in rough shape; hungry and dehydrated with frayed feathers from dragging themselves along the beach."

Massey said it is difficult for him to think about how many birds have died, but the joy of releasing healthy birds back into an oil-free habitat keeps him going.

"The birds that get to us are fighters who have struggled very hard to survive," he said. "We are motivated by their will to live."