

EARTH VIEW

TOPIC: Science & Nature



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Keiko enjoys being rubbed down by Nolan Harvey and Ken Lytwyn of the Oregon Coast Aquarium in Newport.

Keiko swims closer to freedom

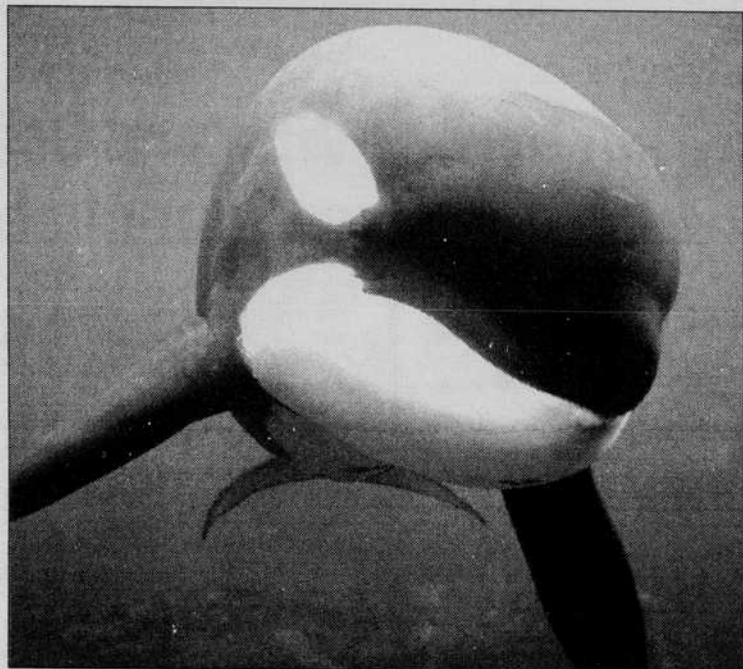
■ **WHALE:** Newport's best-loved orca is on his way to complete rehabilitation and a possible 1998 release

By Eric Collins
Community Reporter

When he arrived underweight, out-of-shape and overwhelmingly lackadaisical, his trainer knew he wasn't ready for the fight. With a viral infection he couldn't shake and a passive mentality shielding his naturally aggressive tendencies, his comeback seemed more than a few years in the distance. Yet, after only a year's worth of strength training, cardiovascular workouts and skill drills, Keiko the killer whale, not Tyson or Holyfield, is much closer to attaining the freedom that he once knew nineteen years ago.

However, like every great fighter, Keiko has a great trainer in his corner: Nolan Harvey. Harvey, the curator of marine mammals at Keiko's rehabilitation facility, the Oregon Coast Aquarium in Newport, said major progress in the whale's mental and physical health since his January 1996 relocation has prompted him to speculate on a 1998 move out of his current two-million gallon homestead.

Harvey, who was hired by the FreeWilly-Keiko Foundation in 1995 to work with Keiko, spoke in Willamette Hall Friday night about Keiko's first year in Newport and the direction of whale research in a session sponsored by the Eugene Natural History



COURTESY PHOTO

Society.

Keiko, the orca-primer movie star from the film *Free Willy*, was in bad shape when he arrived in Newport. Keiko's poor health was due to environmental conditions in his former home in the Reino Aventura amusement park in Mexico City, Harvey said. Keiko was described as a "pool potato," and Harvey said the man-made seawater, confining pool and clockwork schedule all contributed to viral infections, weight loss and overall lack of physical health.

"They realized he was going to die in Mexico City," Harvey said.

Fortunately for Keiko, the move to Newport brought him

into contact with a trainer willing to whip him back into shape. Part of this process has included untraining the training Keiko has received all his life, Harvey said, which hinges on spontaneity.

"Keiko is not a training animal anymore," Harvey said. "He needs to become a killer whale."

Harvey said the three other marine mammalogists assigned to Keiko have tried to constantly stimulate him with "toys," hunting exercises and interaction with divers. These toys are worth more than just entertainment, however. Harvey said pushing around his 200-pound water-filled ball and frolicking with 55-

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