

It was during the 2015 nesting season and, like any other day on sea turtle patrol, I was answering the same basic questions about our activities on the beach. Inquiring bystanders wanted to see the eggs if we are moving them and understand how they got there.

"Is that the track of the mother turtle?" "How long will the eggs take to hatch?" "What will you do to keep them safe?" All of these questions and more were asked by one such observer, a new resident to the island, Karen Kindermann.

We were close to the end of our route; Sea Pines beach is located on the south end of Hilton Head. We started our patrol at 5am and were just about done. I must have gotten some sleep the night before, because I was answering Karen's questions without hesitation.

She was taken by my passion and I was encouraged by her enthusiasm. She asked if she could volunteer or help in any way. I explained that the Sea Turtle Patrol HHI volunteer staff are permitted by the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources. Opportunity is limited and training is unlimited. She said that she would like to meet with me to see if we could come up with another volunteer initiative. I told her what I really needed.

"I need help preparing the beach for the nesting females and hatchlings. This involves filling large holes, picking up trash, and talking to visitors that have no idea that they impact the turtles by leaving the beach a mess."

I thought that would be the end of it. Often the offer to volunteer stops at hard work without the lure of handling hatchlings. Karen called and we met in person with 7 other Sea Pines residents that she had collected in the interim. A team of nine Turtle Trackers was officially born in April 2016, and I cannot imagine my situation without their help. They have supported me with everything from beach cleanup to local legislation. They even brought me dinner daily when I patrolled the beach all night long during beach renourishment. It is a group of friends of mine that have the same passion and mission to "Save the Sea Turtles".