

Group Trying To Give Sea Turtles A Home

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2-3 minutes

MELBOURNE BEACH — Sea Turtle Preservation Society members will ask town officials tonight to let them renovate a historic Melbourne Beach home to be used for offices and eventually a small turtle hatchery.

The Ryckman House was one of the first built in Melbourne Beach in the 1880s and has remained vacant since Ruth Ryckman died in 1979 at age 97. Her father, G.E. Ryckman, was one of the original shareholders in the town.

At a meeting tonight, the preservation society will ask town commissioners to approve a five- to 10-year lease of the house for \$1 a year. As part of the lease, the society would be required to renovate the house, Town Manager Ken Resor said.

The society would convert the house into office space and a meeting room to show films before its nightly turtle walks in June and July when sea turtles nest on the south Brevard beaches.

The group's 24-hour protection hot line and a large aquarium with sea turtles also would be housed there, Assistant Director Wayne Stinnett said.

"If we can get a long enough lease, we hope to build a pool in the back yard and raise maybe 10 to 12 green turtles a year," he said.

The society would use volunteer labor and donated materials to renovate the house, Stinnett said. If approved tonight, the group probably will start this weekend and hope to have its grand opening on Melbourne Beach Founder's Day on May 1.

"There's a lot of things covered over in the house, but we're going to try to get it back to its original state," society Director Peter Bandre said. "It has a lot of potential for us, especially with the location."

Under an agreement between Ryckman and Melbourne Beach, the town provided upkeep for the house and property in the 1970s, and after Ryckman's death, it became town property.

"It's definitely of value, especially historic value," said town historian and former town commissioner, Frank Thomas. "We've talked about the idea of preserving it but the town doesn't really have the resources to put it aside just as a museum."