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A Whole New Ball Game

Dismayed by the destruction of coral reefs around the world, Todd Barber quit his high-paying job as a management consultant and went to work designing a new type of artificial reef.

His invention: the Reef Ball, an eco-friendly chunk of concrete that resembles a four-foot-high mound of Swiss cheese. Designed to mimic natural coral heads, Reef Balls, according to Barber, are cost effective, easy to install, and more aesthetically pleasing than the sunken ships, discarded tires, and old toilets typically used for artificial reefs.



Courtesy of Reef Development Group, Ltd.

Since founding the Florida-based company in 1993, Barber and his volunteer staff have deployed more than 30,000 Reef Balls worldwide. Based on studies by Japan's Consolidated Reef Study Society, the reefs could help add an estimated 4.25 billion pounds of new fish to the world's oceans.

"There aren't a whole lot of things you can get involved in and really make a difference," says Barber. "But Reef Balls give people the opportunity to replenish coral reefs."

The company's respectable profits from its Reef Ball mold rentals and sales (\$400 to \$6,250 per mold), plus the royalties it receives from its 16 authorized contractors, are plowed back into a foundation that provides free molds and grants to nonprofit reef builders and researchers.

Seventy percent of Barber's business comes from overseas, where widespread reef destruction has become epidemic. The company has large installations off Oman, Malaysia, and the Dominican Republic and is negotiating a test project in the

Philippines that would call for a million Reef Balls.

Barber is less optimistic about reef building in the United States, citing restrictive regulations originally enacted to protect the marine environment. "The permit process is designed to deter reef building," laments Barber. "People who want to build reefs have no idea what they're up against."

But that hasn't stopped Barber, who knows that he has a long road ahead. "Our job won't be done until the reefs are restored," he says. "To accomplish that, we either have to slow down the destruction or speed up our construction process."

By Michael Menduno

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