

Reef Balls Spur Marine Life

Early in the 1990s, alarmed by the rapid deterioration of the world's coastal ecosystems, diver **Todd Barber** thought long and hard about how to improve the quality of artificial reefs that encourage new marine life. For decades people had been throwing old machines, tires and concrete blocks into the water for this purpose. But trash, unattractive to begin with, can also disintegrate and lose its marine communities. "I began to think about taking a great big beachball, making it look gnarly like a brain coral, and wrapping concrete around it," says Barber.

From this early vision there has emerged the thriving, diversified, and much-heralded all-volunteer **Reef Ball Development Group**. Based in Sarasota, Florida, Barber's group has made the so-called "reef ball" into a strong and versatile instrument for protecting marine environments. Concrete is poured into a fiberglass mold. Holes of varying sizes are worked into the structure, giving it the appearance of a rounded Swiss cheese. Reef balls vary in size from six inches to six feet in diameter. Cast around a rubbery bladder, they can be towed by boat to a drop site; the bladder can then be deflated and removed. Helicopters have bombarded coastal waters with reef balls. The Atlantis submarine has deployed them as well.

By "tweaking them a little bit" with varying textures and chemical properties, Barber and his group work to make each ball resemble the natural environment into which it will be inserted. "You're never going to be as good as Mother Nature," says Barber. "But if you mimic what you're trying to fix, you'll be a lot better than nothing." Reef balls have functioned effectively as far north as Newfoundland as well as in tropical and subtropical regions.

Since the group's first officially-sponsored ball hit the waters off West Palm Beach in 1993, more than 30,000 of its balls have been released at over 250 sites worldwide. The beat goes on at the rate of a thousand balls a month. Now the world's largest producer of artificial reefs that are "aesthetically pleasing, ecologically sound, and economically designed," as its literature terms them, the group is split into profit and nonprofit divisions. Market rate sales to customers such as Disney Corporation subsidize distribution to less affluent users. Says **Jay Jorgensen**, the group's grants coordinator: "Our goal is balls in the water."

Tests now under way in the Dominican Republic and St. Lucia are suggesting that the reef ball can stabilize beaches, without pumping in offshore sand for renourishment, as well as protect marine biodiversity. Once enough evidence of success has been gathered, the Reef Ball Development Group plans to bring this technology back home. Tel. (941) 752-0169. URL: <http://www.reefball.org>.

Sea Turtles Win in Court

Last winter a District of Columbia court blocked federal legislation that would have exempted some Florida beaches from the protection of the Coastal Barrier Resources System and opened the way for development projects that would threaten sea turtle habitats. The court ruled in favor of a lawsuit filed last summer by the **Caribbean Conservation Corporation**, the **Coast Alliance**, and the **Center for Marine Conservation**.

During the spring **Rep. Tillie Fowler** (R-FL) attempted to reintroduce the bill as a "stealth rider" attached to a larger piece of legislation also having to do with flood relief in California and military funding for Bosnia. She tried to persuade Florida **Senators Bob Graham** and **Connie Mack** to co-sponsor a Senate version of the same bill. But the citizen organizations mounted an energetic phone campaign that prompted the senators to back off. So, later, did Fowler. The victory stands. URL: <http://www.cccturtle.org> or <http://www.cmc-ocean.org>.

People

Actor **Paul Newman** wanted to film a feature movie on remote Tangier Island in Chesapeake Bay, where watermen and their families have lived and worked in sturdy isolation for three centuries. Finding evidence of sex and alcohol in the script, the citizens of this dry town thumbed down the project. Newman took a long planned trip to the island anyway and walked the streets. Tangier was glad to see him, but still said no.

Ross A. Zito has been named Executive Director of the **Museum of the Hudson Highlands** in Cornwall, NY. An administrator, curator, educator, and exhibit designer, Zito was previously director of the **Lord Stirling Environmental Education Center** in Basking Ridge, NJ. **Scenic Hudson** in Poughkeepsie, NY has named two new board members: **Anne E. Impellizzeri** and **Samuel F. Pryor III**. Recent Scenic Hudson staff appointments include **Deborah Meyer DeWan** as Riverfront Communities Program Director and **Ron Samuelson** as Public Access Specialist.

The 5,000-member **Natural Resources Council of Maine** announces several appointments: former corporate official and Foreign Service Officer **Thomas McAdams Deford** to its Board of Directors, **Cindy Lowry** as lobbyist and organizer, **Jeff McEvoy** and **Karen Woodsum** as outreach coordinators, and **Sue Jones** as staff attorney.

February's *Atlantic CoastWatch* included an article on the **Chesapeake Bay Foundation's** oyster gardening program, which seeks volunteer oyster gardeners. The new contact person for the program is **Stewart Harris**, Fisheries Restoration Coordinator. E-mail sharris@savethebay.cbf.org.

Awards

For excellence in marine environmental protection, **Florida Power and Light** (FPL) has received the **U.S. Coast Guard's** highest honor, the William M. Benkert Award. This follows FPL's development of a comprehensive oil spill response study, habitat protection and endangered species programs, and a recycling and disposal program that