

WHAT ARE REEF BALLS?

By Todd Barber, President & CEO,
Reef Ball Development Group, Ltd.

Reef Balls are mound-shaped concrete artificial reef modules that mimic natural coral heads. The modules have many different sized holes in them to provide habitat for many types of marine life. Reef Balls are made by pouring environmentally safe concrete into patented mold systems. They are engineered to be simple to make and deploy and are unique in that they can be floated to their drop site behind any boat by utilizing an internal, inflatable bladder. Reef Balls are designed to be stable on the ocean floor and have been proven not to move even after hurricane force winds have passed overhead.

Patented Reef Ball systems have several advantages over the artificial reefs currently being built. The modules are affordable, easy to deploy and they populate with fish quickly. Additionally, because the reef can be placed on the sea floor in a systematic way, it lends itself to fishery research.

The Reef Ball Development Group, Ltd. is in the process of constructing 500 Reef Balls to be deployed about 6 miles off the coast of Florida between St. Augustine and Jacksonville. This innovative and proven reef design is the first of its kind to be deployed in all of Northeast Florida.

The reef is being built in honor of Charles H. Kirbo, who served as an advisor to President Jimmy Carter and was a trustee of the Carter Center and of the T.M. and Irene B. Kirbo Charitable Trust. The reef is being built thanks to a grant from the Kirbo Charitable Trust and the Reef Ball Foundation.

The project will be a collaborative effort between local schools, such as Mandarin and Fletcher High Schools, St. Augustine High School and Jacksonville University, community organizations and local businesses such as the Jacksonville Offshore Sportfishing Club and the Jacksonville Reef Research Team. Construction of the reefs is being done by Reef Innovations. The project coordinator, Larry Beggs is Vice President of Reef Ball Development Group, Ltd. and President of Reef Innovations.

The local schools and Reef Research Team can take advantage of the reef in an effort to use this as a research reef. Students from area colleges and high schools will be trained to collect data, like water quality and fish counts, to contribute to a database of information on the productivity of reefs.

Reef Balls are unique among other artificial reefs since they are designed to attract the same number and densities of marine species as the natural reefs. Not having too many or too few of all marine species helps to keep the reefs in "balance" so that production of fish occurs rather than just an attraction of fish. The overall benefit they provide is increased fish habitat in addition to the reefs already offshore.

With 50,000 Reef Balls built and deployed in over 500 projects worldwide, Reef Ball Development Group, Ltd. is making a big splash to help save the world's ailing ocean reefs and contribute to the educational efforts of students interested

in the marine sciences.

The Army Corp of Engineers have finalized a deal with Reef Innovations to provide 100 Pallet Ball sized Reef Balls to be deployed in 5 groups of 20 in Lake Okeechobee. Deployment is expected around the spring of 2000.

Tampa Baywatch is a 501 (c) 3 Florida corporation for environmental stewardship of Tampa Bay Estuary with the purpose of monitoring, restoring and protecting the marine and wetland environments of Tampa Bay. They have been approved for a grant from the Reef Ball Foundation for 10 Oyster and Lo-Pro sized Reef Ball molds to build 100 to 200 Reef Balls over the next year in front of seawalls and under docks in areas devoid of subtidal seagrass or other estuarine habitats. They will use schools, scout troops, kids-at-risk programs and other community groups to construct the Reef Balls for installation primarily in and around northeast St. Petersburg.

The Reef Ball Foundation will donate a Reef Ball to Mote Marine to aid in the rehabilitation of an approximately 300 pound loggerhead turtle who is recovering from a cracked undershell which was broken when she fell off a cement embankment as she was attempting to nest. Mote has been searching for something to enrich her environment somewhat more and they have selected a Reef Ball. Mote Marine also deployed forty Bay Balls in Sarasota Bay last month.

The Reef Ball Coalition won the prestigious Innovation Award developed through the joint effort of Deloitte & Touche and IKON Technology. This award honors "forward thinking companies that use, produce or promote technology based ideas and solutions for the new millennium". It is ironic that Reef Balls, a product made of concrete, has won in the high technology category in today's age of computers!

Source: Reef Ball Update. The website can be accessed at www.reefball.com or the Reef Ball Coalition address: www.reefballcoalition.org



Bruce Barrett and Jan Devries (fishy, fishy) of Bradenton with a redfish and sheepshead caught while fishing with Capt. Steve Warren of the "Summertime Blues" in Sarasota Bay.