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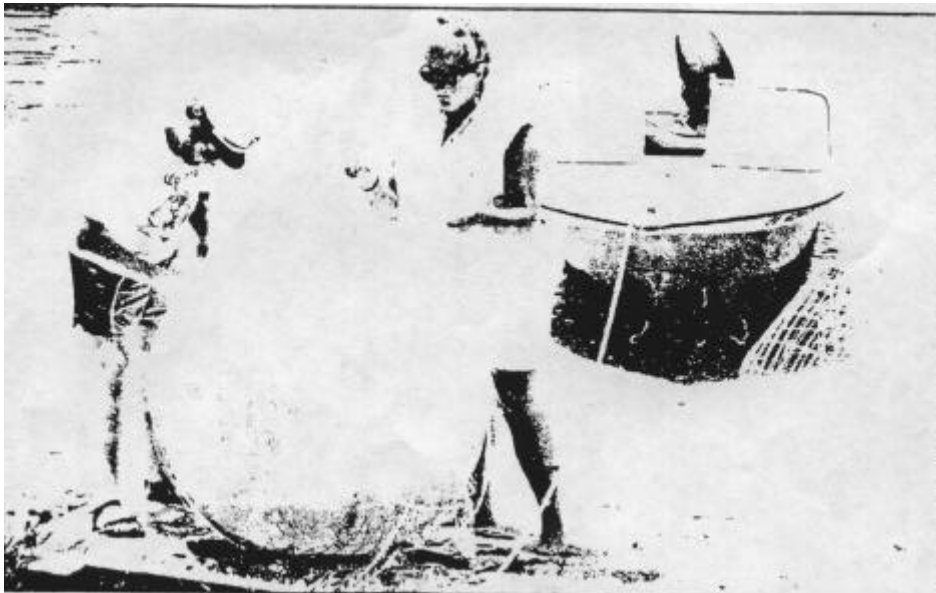
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Group shapes balloons, wire into 1-ton reef balls

By Chris DUMMIT,

Palm Beach Staff Writer

SINGER ISLAND - Laura Barber tied Fiberglass strands on the round wire frame until it looked like a giant ornament. Next it would need several coats of concrete. But despite its unusual appearance, the balloon-and-wire structure is of the work of some avant-garde sculptor - it's a reef ball designed to attract fish. Barber her husband, Todd, and their friends are building the latest in artificial reefs on the beach of the Bellatrix Resort on Singer Island. By noon Sunday, the four 1-ton balls will be towed to a county reef site in the Intracoastal Waterway. The balloon inside each of them will be deflated and the balls will sink to the bottom of Lake Worth. We've always been avid divers, said Todd Barber whose father, Jerry helped design the reef balls. "We came up with the idea when a we were sailing through the Virgin Islands." Barber said his father who is an inventor who once built amusement park rides. Jerry Barber now owns an import/export company, Fortuna Inc., with offices to Greenville, S.C., and St.



SCOTT WISEMAN/Staff Photographer

Don and his wife, Jane, apply Fiberglas to a balloon-and-wire Reef Ball Friday behind the Bellatrix Hotel in Rivera Beach. The ball will be

covered in concrete and sunk in the Intracoastal.

\$75 reef balls have county OK

REEF From 1B

Petersburg, Russia, his son said. The Reef Balls came to Palm Beach County because Jerry Barber wanted a tropical location and County officials granted him a test site. Another group of the balls will be tested in the surf of Destin later this year. Barber wanted a low-cost way to make an artificial reef, his son said. Dive clubs or fishing clubs could buy the materials for a reef ball from the hardware store for about \$75 and build one in about six hours, he said. With government approval, the reef balls could be sunk in a string or built into a pile.

County officials said they are often approached with artificial-reef ideas... Some have merit, such as the pyramids sunk by University of Miami researchers two years ago off Palm Beach. Others, such as tire reefs and artwork, don't pass muster says Jim Vaughn, analyst for the county's Environmental Resources Management. The county has given Barber permission to use a permitted site for the reef balls on the east side of the Intracoastal south, of Palm Beach Inlet. "We're not promoting it or discouraging it," Vaughn said. "We told them a couple of concerns we had." Vaughn inspected the structures Friday to make sure the materials wouldn't harm the environment.