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. Web posted Saturday, May 13, 2000

# What in the world is that?

## It's a reef ball, but, of course

### By MARGO C. POPE

*Senior Writer*

A St. Augustine High School project to build a reef offshore may lead to another one closer in, but to do it, funding must be available.



ANNETTE

*An inside view of a ball, one of dozens in a field off Anz Boulevard south Lighthouse. Mac concrete, the balls to be placed in the help build an artificial reef.*

Phil Stewman, an SAHS science instructor and founder of the school's Sea Explorer program, says concrete reef balls have the capability of helping rebuild beaches.

He wants a site about 1,000 feet offshore that is 20 yards long so that data can be collected on the project.

"A wave, once it hits the ball, will break over the ball that will allow the water to carry the sand on the beach," he said. "The idea is to work with nature and not against it."

"The sky is the limit," he said.

A small test area in the Dominican Republic has added about 80 feet to a section of beach, Stewman said.

County Commissioner Marc Jacalone is working with Stewman on the proposed renourishment project. Jacalone said a location about 1,200 feet off a section of Vilano Beach is ideal for the test. This is in the area where the county has restricted beach driving access.

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because of erosion.

"We have had many discussions on the beach renourishment problem we have here," Jacalone said. "There is a great possibility these balls placed down the coastline can aid in the restoration. ... Hopefully can support it."

He said the county may use some of its reef enhancement funds for such a project.

County Administrator Ben Adams was directed by the commission to work with Stewman to come up with a cost analysis for a proposed test area. Adams said Stewman's timing is good because it is within the time frame for the development of the 2001 fiscal year budget. That budget year begins Oct. 1.

Stewman had no cost estimate, but Adams said the budget office will work with Stewman on the proposal.

"We certainly need the help because we are self-funded," he said. The reef ball project under way has received funding from private donations including the Kirby Foundation of Atlanta, area businesses and personal contributions.

Meanwhile, the Sea Explorer's artificial reef construction project will begin on June 3 when the reef balls are moved from a city lot on Anastasia Island to the ocean.

They will be carried by shrimp boats 13 miles offshore. The students will then go into the water and release the balls on the sea floor, Stewman said.

Stewman said the concrete balls have a lifespan of 500 years on land but in the ocean, they will last indefinitely.

David Austin, one of the Sea Explorers, told the commission that the students are proud of this accomplishment.

"It is really an awesome thing to be involved in something that is going to be out there forever," he said. "Something you can dive on. To see something you built and then to come back later and dive on it."

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