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### **Teamwork plays on the Reef Ball Project**

Dressed in stocking caps with ski gloves, heavy flannel shirts and winter coats, they were out at first light, marking the area with orange buoys, so a floating crane could move steadily by dropping clusters of concrete reef balls with bombing-like precision.

The day before, the weather would have blown away the buoys weighted down with cement blocks, but today only a few of the buoys move and it looks like a "go."

The project had been postponed twice and although it is very cold with a 12-knot wind out of the north and a moderate chop on the harbor, the day is clear and somehow within the range of acceptability.

At 9 a.m., heavily loaded and chugging against the chop, a barge loaded with heavy concrete reef balls makes it's way out of Ponce de Leon Inlet. By 11 a.m. it is at the reef site.

Not a moment is wasted as the barge swings onto course and its three-man crew begins attaching a special bar-rig to the first cluster of reef balls. Then, a crane on the barge lifts the cluster and deposits it on the spot marked by the floating orange buoy. When it's on the bottom, a special release unhooks the cable. The process is ready to be repeated by the time the barge travels 175 feet to the next location. It is the well-orchestrated ballet; artfully presented and well done.

Jensen, director of the Charlotte Harbor Artificial Reef Association, along with County Marine Extension Agent Rich Novak, and Charlotte Marine Research Team divers Arif Shurdho and Dick Percell, circle the barge in the county boat, supervising the work.

The work consists of submerging 175 clusters of three (reef balls) spaced 175 feet apart, up and down each side of the reef, plus a trio at each end. "An eighteen hundred pounder and two 300 pounders," Jensen said.

Next we'll be putting 72 under the Gilchrist and Laishley fishing piers. We just completed installing 174 under private docks in PGI. Two to a dock," he

said. Jensen noted that to date his group has installed close to 500 reef balls in three sperate projects in the Upper Charlotte harbor area. The work is designed to stimulate the fish populations and will also improve the surrounding ecology.


It's a team effort.

By Michael Heller

WaterLine Editor

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