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'Reef balls'

New option for burying corpses helps fish

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OCEAN CITY, N.J. (AP) _ As if shooting them into space or pressing them into artificial diamonds were not sufficiently offbeat, the deceased can now have their ashes mixed into concrete to help form ocean fish habitats.

A Georgia company has placed about 200 of the concrete cones, called 'reef balls,' in the ocean, mostly along the Gulf Coast. Last week, it interred cones filled with the ashes of several former New Jersey residents about seven miles off the shore as part of the Great Egg Reef.

Eternal Reefs was founded by Don Brawley and George Frankel in 2001 after Brawley, an accomplished diver, had the idea of mixing human ashes with concrete to make the reef balls into memorials.

``Most states with reef programs buy artificial reefs," Frankel said. ``We like to think that we're buying public reef balls with private money."

Burying a loved one's ashes in a reef ball can cost between \$1,000 to \$5,000. Decatur, Ga. -based Eternal Reefs also has two models for pets, for \$400 and \$500.

The balls have grapefruit-sized holes in them to dissipate currents, and their surface is dimpled to encourage coral growth.

The company received approval from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection to put

ashes in the reef installations. The Great Egg Reef also contains decommissioned Army tanks and old tires cabled together.

Relatives and friends of those interred last week said they wanted to do something more tangible with their loved ones' ashes than scattering them or leaving them on a shelf.

“I thought we would get my three kids together and we would sprinkle them on the ocean,” Kit Aronson, who buried the ashes of her husband Robert, told The New York Times for Saturday's editions.

“But this is doing it in a more identifiable fashion, where the kids can see where he is. Not in a mausoleum or Arlington Cemetery, but outdoors.”

Ruth Townsend, a close friend of the Aronsons, deemed it a fitting memorial to a man who loved the shore.

“For Bobby, it wasn't about the beach, it was about the ocean and fishing,” Townsend said. “This man would fish in the snow, and this way, he's part of the sea, and part of its renewal.”

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