

CORALATIONS KICK-OFF

Portions of the following are reprinted from an article by Eugene Conner that appeared in The TriStar Times of Puerto Rico, May 1996

The workshop to launch Coralations was held at the Coparrina Regien on the south coast east of the entrance to Guayama Bay on the Caribbean Sea. It's recent expansion had successfully preserved the natural environment and much of the flavor of the real Puerto Rico that exists outside the grounds of the big San Juan tourist hotels. Given the positive attitude of the management towards people and the natural environment, it came as no surprise that the hotel gave active support to the conference and its participants.

The principal theme of the conference was the preservation of coral reef systems, although it included, as well, information on anchorage buoy systems and other relevant topics. The main attraction was an illustrated talk by Mary Ann Lucking, Project Coordinator of Coralations, whose president is Orlando Pesazo. Ms. Lucking made a clear, well-prepared presentation explaining that "Coralations is a non-profit ocean conservation organization whose mission in Puerto Rico is to preserve, nurture and educate. It is urgent that we nurture the already compromised habitat through scientifically proven methods of habitat enhancement, educate local communities by involving them in these projects, with a special focus on the young persons of Puerto Rico."

Ms. Lucking showed an excellent grasp of local problems: an addiction to consumerism and the "throw-away culture," the demoralizing effects of industrialism and its tendency to isolate human beings from nature, water pollution, overfishing and large-scale commercial fisheries, limits or no-enforcement of controls and conservation strategies, and other problems. Ms. Lucking focused upon the very serious issues of mangroves destroyed by development, degradation and destruction of coral reefs, particularly by extraction and recreational overuse, and direct damage by boat anchorage practices.

Coralations hopes to provide progressive solutions. The group was established by local residents who serve on the board of directors. The workshop drew government representatives, private conservationists

and business interests and also featured speakers from around the Caribbean who provided a framework for action to protect Puerto Rico's coral reef.

"This kickoff begins phase one of our marine conservation activities on the island of Puerto Rico," noted Lucking.

Reef Relief's Craig and DeVon Quinno provided information on reef nursing booms and community-based efforts. "Reef Relief is encouraged that through Coralations, a partnership can be formed between government and the private sector that will provide protection and encouragement for the coral reefs of Puerto Rico," noted Craig.

Todd Barber of Reef Ball, an Atlanta-based all-volunteer group, presented information on the latest technology on artificial reef development to enhance and restore the island's reefs. "Reef balls are prefab concrete modules that mimic natural overhangs in both form and function and can be manufactured locally and deployed by any sized boat, using a unique floating deployment system," noted Todd.

James Couvres, Superintendent of the Bermuda Zoo, Aquarium and Museum of Natural Resources, described his successful project to reintroduce the Caribbean Pink Flamingo to the British Virgin Islands and the West Indian Conservation Project established to provide a database of conservation programs, projects and research to assist in the recognition of critically endangered species and habitat. "The 25 major island groups of the West Indies are home to over 7000 identifiable endemic terrestrial plants and animals. Fully 19% of the 1,357 species are threatened or endangered," noted Mr. Couvres. Flamingos once inhabited the salt ponds of Culebra and other parts of Puerto Rico and could be reintroduced.

The star of the day however was Maryann Flores-Parilla. The 11-year old of Coralations's Conservation Youth Corps spoke on why we all need to be concerned about ocean conservation efforts. "I am just suggesting that people can help solve some of the problems hurting the ocean and even if that is not our job, we still have to pitch in because we need the ocean," Mary Ann concluded.