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Eternal Reef 'balls' drop anchor in Gulf

Firm mixes concrete and ashes to make memorials for dearly departed

Houston Business Journal - by [Greg Barr](#) Houston Business Journal

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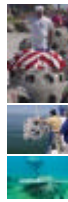
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Growing up in Louisiana, Kay Van Cleave recalls how her mother would ship the kids off to school and head for a nearby lake to fish. When the family moved to Houston in the 1950s, her mom made regular trips to Galveston for offshore fishing.



"She loved to fish and would go every chance she could," recalls Van Cleave.

After her mother's death in 1989, Van Cleave scattered half her ashes in the Irish Sea and kept the rest. She later read an article about a company called **Eternal Reefs** and knew she had found the ideal final resting place for her mother's remaining ashes.

Eternal Reefs mixes concrete with remains to make reef "balls," underwater memorials that provide a habitat for fish.

"That was so cool. The best thing I ever heard of," says Van Cleave.

Her mother's ashes are part of a memorial reef ball placed on the Gulf floor near South Padre Island in 2004.

The combination of angling and environmentalism made a fitting dual tribute, she says.

"She loved fishing, and here was a chance to do something good for the ecology," says Van Cleave. "I thought about how tickled my mother would be about this. And it gave me closure."

Reef balls roll off Freeport

George Frankel hopes to hear from others like Van Cleave.

The CEO of Atlanta-based Eternal Reefs is looking for prospects who want to preserve the remains of family members -- even pets -- in the company's first Houston-area reef ball placements off the coast near Freeport.

The balls will become part of the George Vancouver fishing reef created from a sunken World War II Liberty ship about seven miles offshore. The site is under permit and maintained by the **Texas Parks and Wildlife Department** (see box).

Frankel says Eternal Reefs has seen growing interest in Texas, especially Galveston, which lacks the reef stuff.

"The area around Galveston doesn't work so well because the bottom is too soft and there are so many oil and gas transmission lines around," Frankel explains. Freeport has several established reefs.

Six families have signed up to be part of the Freeport memorial. As many as 15 separate commemorative reef balls will be placed in a cluster 50 feet below the surface when the late-October dedication

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takes place.

Reef balls are available in varying sizes and price ranges, depending on personal preferences.

The Mariner, the largest, weighs nearly 4,000 pounds and can accommodate up to four sets of remains for a cost of \$6,495.

The cost for placing remains in a community reef to commingle with ashes of non-family members is \$2,495.

Pet owners can consign the remains of a beloved dog or cat to a permanent ocean resting place on the Pearl reef ball for a price of \$895.

A father's request

Don Brawley founded Eternal Reefs in 1999, a year after he was asked to include his father's remains in a reef ball. Brawley had earlier set up Reef Ball Development Group to produce concrete reef "balls" to help repair ecologically important reef structures.

The memorial castings are done under subcontract by Reef Innovations in Sarasota, Fla.

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