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SFS Agreement with Reef Ball Foundation to Rebuild South Caicos Reefs

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The School for Field Studies Enters Agreement with Reef Ball Foundation to Build and Study Artificial Reefs
May 14, 2008

South Caicos, Turks and Caicos Islands—The School for Field Studies (SFS) announces a new agreement with the Reef Ball Foundation (RBF) to restore the reef marine habitat around South Caicos Island, where SFS has maintained a permanent field station for almost 20 years. With the help and guidance of RBF and their series of prefabricated Reef Ball™ mold systems, SFS will create, deploy, and study underwater groupings of specially designed artificial reef structures that will provide new habitats for coral, fish, and marine wildlife. SFS faculty and students will be lending their marine research expertise and hard work to make this ecosystem restoration project a reality starting in September of 2008.

Reef Balls are designed to imitate natural reef formations, giving nature a jump-start by supplying what would take many years of biological growth to accomplish, and providing a medium to promote new growth. They are dome-shaped concrete structures that are a Swiss-cheese of holes, providing a textured surface area for coral, algae, and sponges to settle and grow while creating water flow vortices that allow these species to feed. Their hollow shapes provide ideal habitats for fish, lobsters, and other marine life, which move in soon after deployment.

South Caicos is fringed by the world's third largest barrier reef system: one of the more pristine marine habitats in the Caribbean. These reef areas face die-off due to the effects of global warming, unsustainable and destructive fishing practices, and physical destruction due to storms and anthropogenic factors such as boat anchors and unregulated development. It takes thousands of years for a reef to form naturally, and the degradation or outright destruction of a reef can be devastating to ocean and coastal life, with entire ecosystems being wiped out.

"Reef Balls are an excellent educational tool," explained SFS Professor Catherine Jadot, who has helped to pull this agreement together. Before she began working at SFS in September of 2007, Professor Jadot volunteered with the Reef Ball Foundation rebuilding other reef areas in the Caribbean. Working with RBF seemed a natural fit with SFS. "This is a wonderful opportunity to combine state of the art technology with research opportunities for students in a project that will be rebuilding our reef and helping the local community."

RBF will be providing the molds—hard shells of resin and fiberglass of patented engineered shapes that will be filled with a special PH-balanced marine concrete—along with the training and expertise to create and deploy the finished Reef Balls in the most effective manner. Beyond this, RBF will be offering SFS training and guidance in coral transplantation, replanting corals whose habitats are currently damaged or endangered to speed the marine recovery process along.

SFS plans to deploy the first by the fall of 2008, and continually install more over the next five years in two growing areas that will closely resemble natural reefs. SFS students will have the opportunity to assist with this project, building reefs and assessing their progress and development.

SFS has a commitment to promote sustainability in their host communities. Maintaining the beautiful marine environments, home to a multitude of diverse, interdependent species, is critical to the local population who rely on fishing for their livelihoods. Resorts under development on the island are banking on the draw of the marine life around South Caicos for diver tourism. This proactive rebuilding of the reef marine habitat will help ensure that tourism growth happens in a sustainable manner, without damage to ecology or economic development.

About the Reef Ball Foundation

Established in 1993, RBF is a non-profit organization with the mission to rehabilitate the world's ocean reef ecosystems and to protect natural reef systems using Reef Ball™ artificial reef technologies. Reef Balls are artificial reef modules placed on the ocean to form reef habitat. RBF engages in projects including the design of artificial reefs, coral propagation and planting systems, estuary restoration, mangrove plantings, oyster reef restoration, erosion control (often beach erosion), and expert collaboration on a variety of oceanic issues. RBF works with environmental agencies, universities, community groups and corporations; empowering others to build and restore their local marine ecosystems. RBF has placed Reef Balls in 59+ countries with a global reach of projects in over 70 countries, and has conducted more than 3,500 projects and deployed over half a million Reef Balls. www.reefball.org

About The School for Field Studies

Since 1980, The School for Field Studies (SFS), a leader in field-based study abroad, has combined hands-on environmental studies with scientific research to develop sustainable solutions to critical environmental problems. SFS students work with communities in developing nations to discover practical ways to manage their natural resources. In the process, SFS students undergo a transformational experience that assists them in advancing their careers as skilled professionals and globally aware citizens. SFS continues to conduct research and work with local communities through its centers in Mexico, the British West Indies, Costa Rica, Kenya, and Australia. SFS is a non-profit educational institution based in Salem, MA. www.fieldstudies.org

For more information and digital photos, please contact
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Links of interest

- [Profile of Todd Barber, Reef Ball designer, "CNN Heroes of 2008"](#)
- [Reef Ball Wikipedia entry](#)
- [Reef Ball coral propagation article](#)

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