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PULSE

Eternal Reefs:

Not Quite Reefs, Not Quite Eternal, But Maybe As Close As Any Of Us Will Come Either In This ...Lifetime?

by Arin Greenwood

An Eternal Reef is a two ton artificial reef consisting of pollutant-free concrete and human cremain

The artificial reef (called a "Reef Ball") is an enormous cast-concrete structure, round in shape and covered in holes. Collections of them are deployed in parts of the ocean -- so far mainly in Florida Gulf Coast -- which need more fish habitats. The areas are all sanctioned for this deployment by re laws, and, once sunk, the reef balls are donated to the federal, state, or local governments.

Though the human ash doesn't itself add anything environmentally helpful, the concrete reef balls (without cremains) are such good hosts for oceanic life that within a year, they're covered with arou pounds of biomass, including coral pupae that attach to and then grow on the reef balls, plants that around the reef balls, and fish that live inside them.

Cremains can be ensconced in a one person reef ball, or else be part of a "community reef" which c the cremains of up to five people. (One woman had the ashes of her first husband, her second husb, and her second husband's first wife all put into one reef ball.) The cremains get all mixed together community reef balls, but each person gets his or her own commemorative brass plaque, said plaqu becoming a permanent part of the artificial reef.

During special deployment ceremonies, loved ones of the person or people whose ashes are includ particular reef ball take a boat out to the designated site and watch as the reef balls are sunk.

Family members are also provided with exact latitude and longitude coordinates of the reef ball of to them, so that they can visit the artificial reefs on their own. The designated sites can be visited by paddlers, scuba divers, and other watery types. The company that makes the Eternal Reefs (Eternal Inc.) is in the process of developing a video system that will also allow land lubbers to watch the re the internet.

The jokes and puns about Eternal Reefs are so obvious that I can't bear repeating them. They've be emptied, anyway, by George Frankel, one of the company's founders, who tells me that all those "s with the fishes" and "do they have to be dead already?" comments are really only funny the first co hundred times you hear them.

And in any case, even if you were to come up with an original humorous statement about Eternal R wouldn't be funny for long, since "with just a moment's reflection," he says, "the humor is replace genuine sense that this is just a good idea."

Eternal Reefs have so far seemed like a good idea to at least 200 people, beginning with the father-of Don Bawley, another of the company's founders.

According to [the company's website](#), Eternal Reefs were preceded by plain old artificial reefs (sans cremains). The artificial reefs were created by a group of scuba buddies who wanted to "do someth counteract natural coral reefs' decline.

The reef ball business became Eternal Reefs when Bawley's father-in-law, Carleton Glen Palmer, was diagnosed with terminal cancer and requested that his ashes be included in one of the artificial reef the website, this request is explained as a natural extension of Mr. Palmer's life-long affinity with t and especially with fish.)

All with decision-making power said yes to the request, and in 1998 when the father-in-law died, th reef made partly of human ashes was deployed. News got out, and when all sorts of people started requesting the same treatment, a company was born.

According to Amanda Leesburg, who does public relations for the company, Eternal Reefs appeal to "environmentalists, scuba divers, anyone who has grown up or lived near the sea, anyone who was buried at sea, individuals who wish to be cremated, and anyone who requests an alternative burial s

George Frankel adds that Eternal Reefs also appeal to individuals and families who are without fan plots, and to family members who are no longer living in close proximity to one another. (One refr from mentioning that by the time Eternal Reefs become relevant, at least one of the family member longer living near anyone.) "It also seems to appeal to people who have been busy and active all th lives," he says. "It seems so much better to be doing something constructive after they are gone tha lie around in a cemetery with all those dead people."

But even after the recommended moment of reflection, Eternal Reefs still seem sort of funny. And only to me. Keuka College Assistant Professor of Philosophy and Religion Michael McKenzie's fi reaction to Eternal Reefs is, "Every time I think I've heard it all, something like this comes around

With further probing, Professor McKenzie offers the rather depressing view that Eternal Reefs are amusing because "people's 'death wishes' reveal some of their deepest desires, and some of them ar plain loony!" Their "death wish" in this case, explains the professor, is to not die.

"I see this as this usual drive for permanence, combined with a modern pantheistic twist of wanting 'one with everything,'" he says. "And all this probably combined with an environmental spin: 'Now Mort is "alive forever," helping the ecosystem."

Given their shape, size, material composition, and locations, Eternal Reefs are predicted to last for five centuries, which is, perhaps, as close to eternity as any of us can expect to get.

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