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Currents

Sea-ing is believing

Atlanta-based Reef Ball Foundation dropped 500 reef balls into the ocean from a barge on Ponte Vedra Beach Tuesday.

Students from Jacksonville University and Mandarin and St. Augustine high schools, who helped mold the reef balls out of concrete, watched as their handiwork was lowered into the water.

The reef balls, designed to last a minimum of 500 years and imitate a natural coral reef, were built and deployed with \$25,000 donated by the city and \$60,000 contributed from the Reef Ball Foundation.

The spheres will be "barely recognizable as a reef ball in a year," said Todd Barber, chairman of the nonprofit organization.

The Jacksonville students produced 215 artificial reefs in about a year. Reef Innovations in Orlando built another 485 reefs. The reef balls not deployed this week will be released into the ocean in St. Augustine over the next 18 months.

There are eight sizes of reef balls, which cost \$40 to \$325 to make and can weigh from 450 pounds to 5,000 pounds.

The reef off Ponte Vedra Beach honors Charles H. Kirbo, a former advisor to President Jimmy Carter. An underwater plaque was added to the reef in recognition of Kirbo.

"My dad was a great conservationist and fisherman," said Kathy Kirbo, director of the Thomas & Irene Kirbo Charitable Trust. This project, Kirbo said, "provides educational and re-search

opportunities for the greater Jacksonville area."

The Kirbo Charitable Trust, founded by Charles Kirbo and based in Jacksonville, donated \$150,000 to help build various artificial reefs.

-- Christine Selvaggi



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