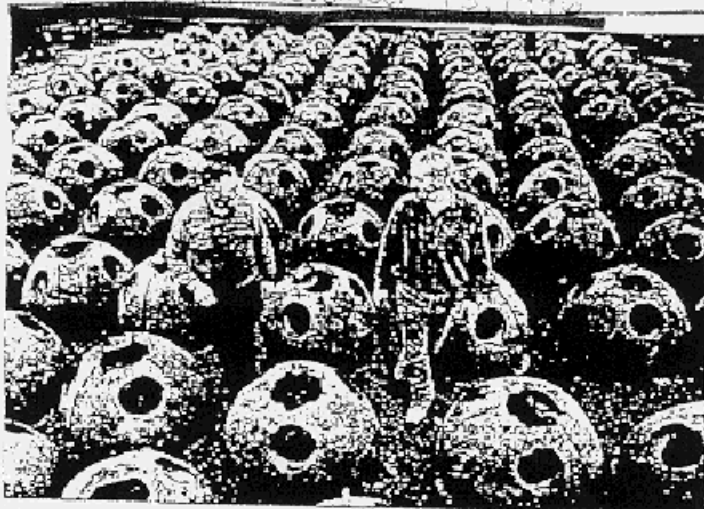


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MET WITH THE COLONIST

Reg Teaney and Burt Mincer among the reef balls that were made to form an artificial reef off the Sidney waterfront.

COMMUNITY PROJECT

Concrete balls may be haven for marine life

By Susan Chung
Times Colonist staff

Early Thursday avert the pale morning light, Reg Teaney and a group of his friends will descend upon Sidney pier and toss huge concrete piers into the water. No, it's not a waste of time. Teaney is trying to make an artificial reef for sea creatures in Sidney.

Like some sort of aquatic Field of Dreams, Teaney believes that if the reef balls at the shrimp, crab and fish will come.

"It's been four years in the making," said Teaney looking out at the built-but-pier. "It took two years just to get all the permits."

But Thursday morning, when a floating barge and crane toss the 100 concrete reef balls, more than half the project will be complete, said Teaney, the chair of the Sidney Estuary Development Committee.

The pier is 80 metres long now, but will be 180 metres when complete. It will be T-shaped, with an artificial reef of small reef balls running along both sides of the long leg of the T. A narrow reef near the head of the T will be built up with a mix of small and large reef balls.

The reef balls look like yellow, porous, round with large holes. The large ones measure 1.3 metres across the top. The small ones being 30 centimetres. Thursday morning, about a metre across, in the bay and weigh 270 kilograms each.

Teaney said the fibres that give concrete balls become stronger as they sit in the water, and last 300 years. A company in Georgia provided the initial moulds, but

the town made eight more and manufactured the balls themselves.

Indeed, the whole project has been self-financing, with the community raising the money for the project.

"Not one dollar comes from the government," said Brenda Maxfield, one of the project's volunteers. Donations have come in from individuals, businesses and even high school students, who are collecting food labels from Teaney's grocery store list. The grocery store will donate five cents per label to the pier.

In total, the community has raised \$475,000 of the \$750,000 needed.

But whether the fish will come and the pier and reef are complete in the next few weeks next year, remains murky.

"It's not a large quantity," said Brian Sweeney, marine adviser at the Institute of Ocean Sciences.

Although artificial reefs have been built and have successfully attracted marine life in other parts of the world, there are some unusual characteristics to the proposed Sidney reef.

The two reefs running along with the long leg of the pier will run perpendicular instead of parallel to the shore.

That means the current will flow through the reef instead of skimming along it.

The invertebrate researchers, who will be monitoring the progress of life on the reef balls, should see a few fish, but it will take for sponges and other marine life to come to take in the concrete and fibre glass pods.

"It's a real question mark as to what's going to happen there," said Sweeney.

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Brian Sweeney, marine adviser at the Institute of Ocean Sciences

It's been four years in the making. It took two years just to get all the permits.

Reg Teaney, project organizer

Not one dollar comes from the government.

Brenda Maxfield, volunteer