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## Reef ball project under way

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The Marriott Beach Resort is working in collaboration with the Department of Environment and the visiting US-based Reef Ball Foundation in an effort to protect and restore Cayman's spectacular reefs.

This effort is largely in response to the damage caused by Hurricane Ivan and seeks to rehabilitate near shore habitats that were lost, a press release notes. The future of the island is largely dependant on the accountability of our local community, it says.

"We are thrilled to host the Reef Ball Foundation representatives and to have the opportunity to be involved in such a worthwhile cause. As a community it is essential that we step up to the plate and take responsibility for the future of our island," said Carolina Voullieme, the Marriott's Director of Sales and Marketing.

The Reef Ball Foundation is a non-profit organisation dedicated to restoring waters and natural reef ecosystems. Through preservation, Reef ball technology and innovative public education projects they aspire to protect the natural reefs.

Todd Barber, CEO of The Reef Ball Foundation, has been diving Grand Cayman's reefs for over 20 years and invented "reef balls" – modular artificial reefs – in response to damage caused by hurricane Gilbert in 1988.

Reef balls have now been used in over 55 countries. His goal in starting the foundation 13 years ago was to ensure that his children can continue to enjoy the same reefs that continue to captivate him today.

The Marriott's management team and associates have been learning about the core foundations of this effort, and as such, Marriott has come to recognise that community involvement is paramount to its success.

"It is crucial that we educate locals regarding how to protect our environment and ensure that the natural beauty of our island is preserved for generations to follow," said Marriott's Director of Operations, Panna Utpaul.

Representatives from the foundation are being complementarily accommodated at the Marriott Beach Resort for the duration of their stay on island from of 25 February through 4 March. While on island they have a challenging agenda to accomplish. They will be building reef balls for Cayman's mangroves as well as educating the public how they can contribute to restoring the waters and natural reef ecosystems.

They are appealing to any volunteer support that they can receive in this effort. On Tuesday, they began filling the molds for the reef balls on the Marriott property by the pool and they welcome and encourage guests and locals alike to join in.



US Reef Ball Foundation nursery workers Catherine Jadot, left, Emily Manz and Joe Lazarsky transplant young coral into tiny cups to be placed in reef balls by divers. Photo: Jewel Levy



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This presents guests staying at the Marriott the opportunity to get involved in a guest programme oriented on topical environmental themes as well as to participate in the casting of reef balls.

On Friday, 2 March the Marriott will be hosting a presentation by the Reef Ball Foundation experts to inform the community about projects under way, as well as to educate the public about how to restore local marine ecosystems.

This presentation will be hosted in Balboa's Lounge located in Marriott's main lobby area on Friday 2 March at 5pm. There will be complimentary refreshments provided for those in attendance at the presentation.

"This is a fabulous opportunity to create public awareness which is crucial in ensuring that our ecosystem is protected. Knowledge is power," said Ms Voullieme.

A collective community effort is a surefire tool in the right direction to preserve reefs, says the release.



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