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## Girl Scout creates artificial reef in Oleta River to shelter marine life, achieves award

By Elizabeth Baier  
South Florida Sun-Sentinel  
Posted July 10 2006

Rebecca Schultz has learned that combining the principles of Girl Scouts with her passion for the marine environment can make for some really cool -- and eco-friendly -- creations.

Scouting has taught Schultz discipline to work with others, responsibility to use resources wisely and passion to help make the world a better place. And her hobby as a scuba diver has revealed to her the importance of preserving the vast underwater world.

So on Saturday, Schultz showed 39 of her fellow scouts what she's been working on for the last year and a half -- creating 30 artificial reefs out of concrete molds to help increase native marine life in the Oleta River in North Miami Beach and the Atlantic Ocean off Golden Beach.

"I've always been a water bug," said Schultz, 17, who lives in Sunrise. "But when I started diving two years ago, I noticed that some of the reefs were deteriorating."

That's when she embarked on a project to make some artificial reefs of her own.

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


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With the help of Allan Phipps, her marine biology teacher at South Plantation High School, Schultz applied for and received a \$4,500 from the Reef Ball Foundation and another \$2,500 grant from the Girl Scouts of the United States of America to complete the project. The scouts' award was one of only 14 nationwide and the only one in Florida, according to Jodi Stewart, manager of the Girl Scouts' Linking Girls to the Land program.

Schultz worked with Miami-Dade County and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to design the semi-circular artificial reefs molds, which weigh between 200 and 1,500 pounds apiece, according to Phipps. Once completed, they were dropped slowly into the water using a crane and buoys, Schultz said.

"The reef balls work really, really well," Phipps said. "They're relatively easy to make and it's a simple concept."

The project also helped Schultz meet the requirements for the Gold Award, the Girl Scouts' highest award for completing a project that fulfills a need within the scout's community, as well as a required project for her marine biology class. On the school project, Schultz has been working with her classmates Sara Yinger, 17, and Veronica Lafranchise, 17, who is also a Girl Scout.

On Saturday, Schultz and Lafranchise took some of their fellow scouts snorkeling near one reef, which was submerged in the Oleta River on March 25. They taught the girls how to test the water's oxygen and Ph levels, as well as use GPS, or Global Positioning System, navigation to locate items above and below the water.

"It's introducing me to some of the things I'm going to learn next year in marine biology, so it's good," said Christina Eubanks, 16, of Cooper City.

And as for the reefs, they seem to be working well, judging by some of the sea life they are sheltering.

"There are some yellowtail, parrot fish and angel fish near the reef in the ocean," Lafranchise said. "In [the Oleta River], we've seen some sea squirts and sea urchins."

*Elizabeth Baier can be reached at ebaier@sun-sentinel.com or 954-356-4637.*

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