

# About the River Reef Program

The River Reef Program (RRP) is a component of the County's Estuary Restoration efforts. The program offers a combination of public involvement and education. Participants will learn about the vital roles of our local marine resources. The ecological value of environmentally sensitive habitats, their importance of sustaining those habitats and the ways that human activity has impacted the delicate balance are crucial lessons to be learned. Participants will have "hands-on" involvement with the construction of artificial reef units and their placement in the Estuary.

Martin County's Estuary is home to over 2,200 different species of marine organisms. These include popular animals such as dolphins, turtles, manatees and seahorses as well as some of the most delectable seafood such as oysters, clams, shrimp, lobsters, crabs and fish. Just as important are the many species of plants and other animals that provide shelter and food for sea creatures.

Participant activities like the River Reefs Program offer local citizens a hands-on opportunity to literally "make" a difference while learning how vital that difference can be to the health of the Indian River Lagoon and the resources we derive from this famous estuary. Participants build the Reef Ball™ artificial reef units that will restore lost habitat in this vital nursery area. The physical connection between the reef-builders and the ecosystem they are repairing will lead to an increase in appreciation for the function and value of our County's waterways.

This program has been made possible by grants and assistance from several agencies. The Florida Inland Navigation District (FIND) provided funds to develop and permit this project in 2002. In 2003 FIND was the first organization to provide construction funding. These grants allowed the purchase and customization of the River Reef Trailer, with artwork by local artist Brian Sylvester. The funds also paid for the equipment required to build a reef – cement mixer, generator, air compressor and more. Visit the Trailer Preview link to see the trailer and all the equipment. The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) has provided funding for oyster shell to be laid as a base for the reef areas. The complexity added by the oyster shell base greatly enhances the function of the Reef Balls once they are placed in the water. The Martin County Environmental Studies Center, the Florida Oceanographic Society and the Martin County Parks and Recreation Department have all conducted Reef Ball construction events at various locations around the County.

With our mobile operation the County can either 1) bring the entire set up to the group's location and assist in the set up and construction process, and clean up or 2) bring groups to a location where everything is set up and ready to go. The County can also assist in the education process by providing presentations and educational materials to groups.