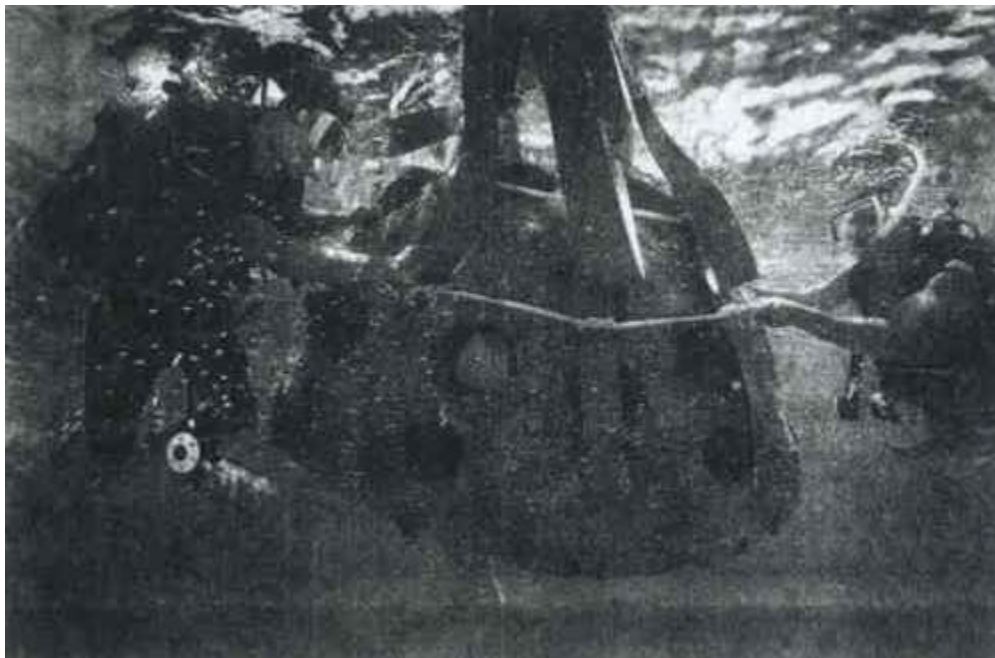


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June 5, 2000



High school class builds reef



ANDRE RODRIGUES of Key Largo and Tom Lardner of Islamorada install one of several reef balls off Islamorada. The Coral Shore High School students sunk the balls in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary to serve as a foundation for coral growth. Students built the balls, installed them and will monitor them to see if they are successful as a marine habitat.

Students learn by doing with underwater instruction

Associated Press

ISLAMORADA - A marine science class partially staged beneath the sea is not only helping to educate high school students but is also providing habitats for fish and other marine creatures.

Recently, a dozen Coral Shore High School students sunk a series of spherical-like, hollow concrete

structures that are known as "reef balls" and look like the tops of giant mushrooms.

The balls, as large as four feet high and six feet wide and weighing up to 2,500 pounds each, are anchored in a sandy area near Davis Reef, in 20 feet of water off Islamorada.

Peppered with holes through which sea currents pass and marine life can swim, they mimic the reef substrate by providing surfaces for soft and hard coral larvae to attach and mature.

The corals help begin the marine food chain that attract fish and other marine life.

Students are involved in the entire process, from permit application to construction, installation and a monitoring process that is shared with scientists at the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary as well as other students via the World Wide Web.

"This should be our classroom," said 18-year-old Todd Boer of Key Largo, pointing to the waters surrounding him. "Our oceans around the world are being degraded, and this is a way for us to learn to help them."

The undertaking is part of the Service Learning Program, a federally funded project in which students get credit for real life experiences.

"The idea is to get kids involved in a community project and then hook the project to things you want to teach," said Coral Shore High School Principal Al Rother. "They're doing something real and the instruction is a byproduct of what they are involved in."

The reef-ball site is easily accessible by boat for divers and snorkelers.

"Since learning to dive for this project, I've come to see and appreciate more of what's beneath the ocean," said 17-year-old Kristina Foreman of Islamorada. "Now, I can visit the site, monitor what we've done and feel good I've been a part of something that helped the marine environment."

On the Web

For more, go to:

Coral Shore High School Marine Studies:

www.monroe.k12.fl.us/csh/foremank/marine-studies-propram.htm

Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary:

www.flmns.nos.noaa.gov/

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