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News

Concrete makes homes sweeter for sea cre

By Candi Calkins
Staff Writer

Eight seawater turtles at Boca Raton's Gumbo Limbo Nature Center can thank H. Wayne Huizenga and his baseball Marlins for making their lives a lot more comfortable.

In the wild, seawater turtles sleep under rock ledges. But in Gumbo Limbo's barren tanks, which opened last summer, the turtles' only refuge was to stick their heads into drains.

City officials hope the turtles will welcome a giant concrete reef ball created inside their saltwater tank last week, at the city's educational facility on State Road 41A, just about a mile north of Palmetto Park Road.

"We're able to provide that space with these reef balls," said Milda Simonaitis, marine conservationist.

A second reef ball donated by the Reef Ball Development Group, an Atlanta-based company, was placed in a saltwater tank destined as a home for sharks and stingrays, Simonaitis said.

Marlins connection

And it all started with the Marlins' opening season.

Margie Colbert, a volunteer program interpreter for Gumbo Limbo, had season tickets to the Marlins. Sitting nearby were two volunteers from the Reef Ball Development Group.

The volunteers got acquainted during the Marlins' season, trading information about their educational programs.

Then Colbert told Simonaitis about reef balls, shaped concrete used to create artificial reefs, and help was soon on the way for turtles owned by the city and Florida Atlantic University.

Simonaitis, aware city tanks lacked a refuge for turtles, contacted the reef ball company. The com-



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ARTIFICIAL REEFS ... Joe Kelly of Gumbo Limbo Nature Center sets up a stand for a coral artificial reef and make sea life in the nature center's tanks feel more at home.

pany agreed to donate two reef balls to the nature, pouring the concrete into tanks last week.

Reef education

The reef balls serve another purpose, reminding visitors of the importance of preserving fragile coral reefs.

"We are really trying to educate young people about the importance of preserving the ocean's natural reefs, which are quickly being destroyed by con-

stant exposure from divers and Barber, president of the Reef Group Inc.

By creating artificial reefs, it to draw divers away from reefs whose existence is threatened.

The company has deployed a

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