

HABITATS FROM HUMANITY

Spanish River students provide artificial reefs

By MERLE AUGUSTIN
Staff Writer

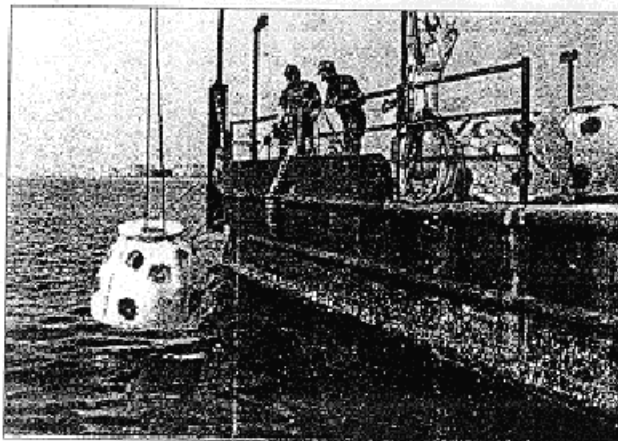
BOCA RATON — A sand perch moved in and other curious fish nosed around as 45 hollow concrete "reef balls" were slowly lowered into the ocean Tuesday off the northern beaches of Boca Raton.

The artificial reef structures — which resemble huge hollow wasp nests or child-size igloos with gravelly exteriors — were assembled during a yearlong project by seven seniors at Spanish River High in Boca Raton.

"I wanted to do something for the ocean," said Kathy Dunag, 19, who participated in the program in 1996 and is now a sophomore at the University of Florida.

Dunag watched with nine other students as a barge lowered the reef structures, weighing 500 to 1,500 pounds, 27 feet to the ocean floor by crane.

Several students wearing shorts, T-shirts and snorkeling gear later jumped into the water to check on the new reef, a half-mile off Red Reef



Workers lower one of cement reef balls from into the Intracoastal in Raton on Tuesday. Spanish River High School in Boca Raton began offering a elective in artificial reef construction in 1996.

Staff photo/HILDA M. PERI

years, said Todd Barber, president of the Boca-based Reef Ball Dev Group and founder of the balls.

"These structures are colonized by barnacles, algae," said Alex Barber, marine ecology professor at Florida Atlantic University.

"Fish use them as a home base, shelter for the small organisms."

Barber's organization provides the fish molds, instructions on how to make the

Park.

"An awareness of the environment needs to start, and it starts in small projects like this," Dunag said.

The cement domes are expected to become home to 450 pounds of marine life and last 500

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