

# Reef project surfaces for TV

Spanish River High School biology teacher Ken Weemhoff and students John Esteves and Cory Kravit release a reef ball from the mold. The reef balls are cement habitats for fish. The class plans to release the balls into the Atlantic Ocean the week of May 12. Turner Broadcasting System was filming the class as it prepared the reef balls for deployment.



Ross Luzzon / SPECIAL TO BOCA RATON NEWS

BY DANETTE GOULET  
SPECIAL TO BOCA RATON NEWS

In only its second year of existence, Ken Weemhoff's honors level biology class at Spanish River High School has received statewide and now national recognition.

TBS, Turner Broadcasting System, is filming the process of building and deploying the reef balls, cement habitats for fish, as a part of a series entitled "Ocean Issues," which will air in late summer or early fall.

Weemhoff's class, Research III and IV Artificial Reef Construction and Deployment, gathered Monday morning, carefully removing pins and screws, breaking away the molding, then letting the air out of buoys that create the holes for fish to swim through.

It was the eighth time these students had conducted this process, but the first time they had done it on camera.

"This is just a small part of a much larger process that you are seeing here," Weemhoff said.

Before the process could begin, they had to obtain a state artificial reef site permit. The students helped obtain these permits after a site survey was done, which requires certain criteria be met.

"There must be no life and there has to be hard bottom covered with loose sediment," Weemhoff said.

Last year, Weemhoff's class built 12 reef balls and sent them to the bottom of the ocean at Mar-a-Lago in Palm Beach.

"Last year, the permit to drop them off Boca Raton had not come through yet; now we have it," Weemhoff said.

According to Weemhoff, El Niño and the weather has slowed them this year, but the goal is to drop 50 reef balls into 30 feet of water off Palmetto Park Road, where they should sink 6 to 12 inches to the hard bottom.

The reef balls are scheduled to be dropped into the Atlantic off the Boca Raton coast the week of May 12.

Spanish River High School students John Esteves, 17, and Steve Barnes, 18, joined Weemhoff in chiseling away excess cement to loosen the mold surrounding the reef ball, as other students shoveled away the sand that held the cement at the base of the mold.

Still others stood ready to replace the pins and buoys to prepare the balls for the next molding.

The national coverage and camera crews were a minor part of the excitement for these kids.

"This isn't the whole class. The other

70 percent of the class is writing grant proposals, doing fund raising and volunteer work, and we also each have science fair projects we do," said Alicia Grossman, a 17-year-old senior at Spanish River.

Last year, the class raised \$10,000 for the project.

"This year we have \$2,000 so far from a national award that is given to 80 teachers, one per state, with \$30,000 additional; we are eligible for as much as \$27,000 of that," Weemhoff said.

This project has many local and state sponsors. The molds were supplied by the Reef Ball Development Corporation, into which Rinker Cement pours surplus cement from their other projects.

Other sponsors include The Junior League of Boca Raton, Leaders In Future Education (LIFE Foundation), the Force B dive shops and Captain Planet, whose abbreviation, CAPT PLANET, is engraved in the side of each reef ball.

"We don't have any expectations from this being on national television, but it's exciting for the kids and their parents, and any time people are made aware environmentally is good," Weemhoff said. □

March 10, 1998

Boca Raton News

► HEROISM