

► MARINE BIOLOGY

River students' hard work goes out to sea

By Viki Scavone

Staff Writer, Boca Raton News

After a year of grant writing, research and construction, 12 reef balls built by an intertidal class of Spanish River High School students have been sent down to sea.

With the assistance of a barge and crane, the balls, ranging from 700 to 1,500 pounds, were placed in the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Double Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach.

Spanish River marine biology teacher Ken Weenhoff developed the Artificial Reef Construction and Deployment class to get students involved in artificial reefs and marine biology.

"The object of this project was not just to build and deploy an artificial reef but to help the kids learn how to get a job done," Weenhoff said.

The 13 honors students taking the class started writing grant proposals in August and raised more than \$10,000 to build the concrete structures, which will help create a complex marine habitat. In December, after months of planning, the first reef ball unit was built.

Arion Tingler, a student who worked on the project, was one of 20 people who attended the ocean deployment on Friday.

"It was very fulfilling, finally getting everything done," the senior graduate said.

The students to come back and visit the site to check on the balls' progress.

The diver-deployed units ranged from two to four feet in height and will create a habitat for filter feeders, which attract small fish, Weenhoff said.

"We have a problem with the number of fish in the world. This will help solve it," Weenhoff said of the structures, which attracted some fish less than an hour after deployment.

The reef balls were modeled using drawings from Reef Ball Development Corp. in Atlanta. Concrete was poured into the molds and air bladders were used to create the oval openings in the finished structure.

Although both students and parents said they loved the project, Weenhoff said he was unsure if the class could be offered next year.

In addition to the reef balls, students participated in several marine biology projects such as the reestablishment of mangrove forests. As a result of this project, students were awarded a total of \$1,000 in scholarship money.

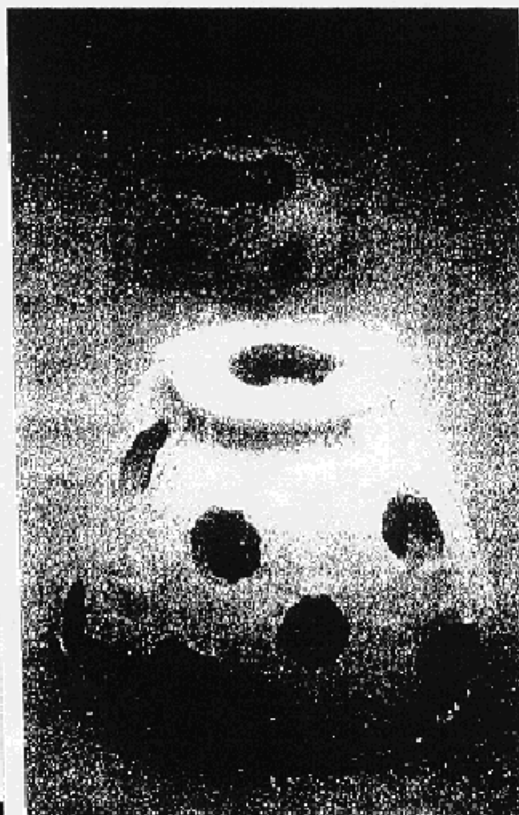
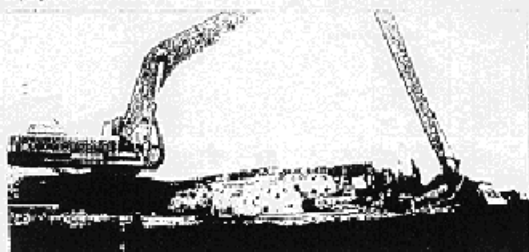


Photo by Bob Hall for the Boca Raton News

Reef balls will be found in various types of size in the area. Spanish River High School students released 12 reef balls on the floor of the Atlantic as part of a research class.



The reef balls rest on a barge in the Atlantic, waiting to be hoisted to the bottom of the ocean.