# Volunteers create reef balls for fish

ERNST FROM 1B

to have 70 pallet balls, weighing 1,650 pounds each, and 140 bay balls, weighing 550 pounds each, for the existing Milelong Reef southwest of Alligator Creek in Charlotte Harbor.

They'll also have 36 bay balls and 36 smaller balls, weighing 90 pounds, for the fishing piers at Punta Gorda's Laishley, Gilchrist and Nature parks.

And, they'll have 180 smaller balls to be installed under homeowners' docks in Punta Gorda Isles. The balls — two for each dock — will be free, but it will cost $40 for delivery and placement.
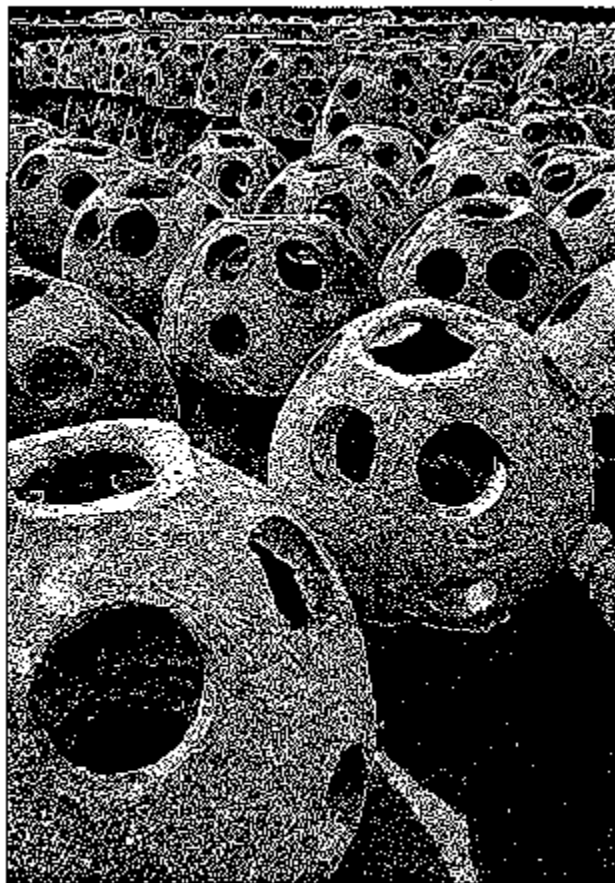
The community saves about $28,000 through the volunteer labor and the generosity of Krehling plant manager Joe Roberts, who donated equipment and storage space. Grants and money from boat and fishing fees — $30,000 or so — will pay for the rest over two years.

That's already more than the $15,000 that's been spent since 1990 on artificial reefs off Charlotte County. In the same period, $813,000 has been spent for reefs off Lee County, $395,000 off Sarasota County.

Rich Novak, sea grant agent for the Charlotte County Cooperative Extension Service, is making up for lost time. He has reopened the permit for Milelong Reef, which was formed in 1983 with debris from the old U.S. 41 bridge. He also has permits for two offshore sites, one in 30 feet of water 2.8 miles southwest of Stump Pass, the other in 60 feet 12.9 miles west-southwest of the pass.

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection has not authorized the city projects, although Jensen and his crew are counting on it.

As Look says, he's in it for more than a good fishing hole. "It's a service to the community," Look says. "It's doing my share." That's a pragmatic outlook for a man who figures that after a valve job to his Mercruiser he's paying about $300 a pound for his keepers.

And that's not counting his work at the concrete plant.



STAFF PHOTO/BURT CASS

Five hundred balls to be used as artificial reefs are being made by 42 volunteers at Krehling Industries in Punta Gorda.