

Charlotte volunteers find way to give back

There's no glory in Jerry Jensen's volunteer work. It's Monday, and once again he heads to the Krehling ready mix concrete plant south of Punta Gorda as he has every Monday, Wednesday and Friday since Nov. 30.

A wind sends the fine dust swirling around him. After 37 years marketing John Deere equipment in Moline, Ill., Jensen never pictured his retirement in this setting.

At the plant, he meets Frank Hall, August Look, Larry Cady, Al Shuhart and Mike Schmitt and the crew starts an afternoon of fitting molds, pouring concrete and hosing off the mess.

The six men and 36 others — all members of the Charlotte Harbor Reef Association, or the Punta Gorda Isles Fishing or Cruising clubs — have embarked on an ambitious, six-day-a-week project.

Their mission: Churn out nearly

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500 reef balls.

Reef balls, a trend in the artificial reef business, are concrete igloos from 2 to 6 feet tall with holes in them.

Nowadays, instead of creating reefs from old tires, culverts and railroad boxcars, we are clustering these igloos, or others like them.

Reef balls have several advan-

tages over concrete debris. They don't move. They last longer. They don't silt over as quickly. And they create a better living area for juvenile fish and other marine life.

For instance, concrete's pH runs as high as 12; reef balls, with a silica additive, have a pH close to seawater's, about 8.3. The lower pH helps attract larval corals, barnacles and other invertebrates that establish a food chain for fish.

Reef balls can't replicate coral reefs or mangroves destroyed by human causes. They are better than doing nothing.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves. First, Jensen and his coworkers, ages 50 to 75, have to handle about 90 yards and 250,000 pounds of concrete over four months.

When they're done, they expect

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Volunteers Bob Norton, left, and C Krehling Industries in south Punta