



KAREN VOYLES/The Gainesville Sun

David Osteen, right, learns from Todd Barber how to prepare and pour concrete into the fiberglass molds that will be the basis for expanding an artificial reef off the Dixie County coastline.

## REEF

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After experimenting, Barber came up with a system for placing a fiberglass mold over an inflated ball. Concrete is poured between the mold and the ball and allowed to harden. After the concrete has set, the concrete form is removed and floated to the reef site. The ball inside the form is deflated and the concrete structure sinks to the bottom.

Reef balls already have been placed in the Florida Keys and West Palm Beach and at sites as far away as England, Barber said. At some sites, coral growth has begun within six months, he said.

### Paying for the project

The entire project will cost a little more than \$30,000, Barber said. In a presentation to the county commission, Barber and Osteen explained how the money will be spent locally.

About \$10,000 will go to purchase the concrete and for labor to build the reef components. Another \$10,000 will be paid to net fishermen to deploy the components at the reef site at a proposed rate of \$50 a reef ball. Approximately \$10,000 will go to Barber's firm to cover the costs of purchasing three molds and paying copyright fees on mold usage for a year.

County commission Chairman Ralph Tyre said the commission has approved spending \$100 on the project, which means the commission will be co-owners of the molds with the school board if the board votes this week to spend \$4,100.

The county already has applied for \$25,000 in federal and state grants — including funds from the saltwater fishing license fund — to pay for the project, Osteen said.

The grant money cannot be used to pay for items like buying the molds, which is why the school board and commission have been asked to contribute. Under the current project plan, net fishermen would be hired at a rate of \$50 a component to help install the completed reef balls.

Barber and county commissioners are confident enough that they will get the grant money that they have already begun using a small mold on a trial basis.