



Dixie County High seniors launched nearly two dozen reef balls into the Gulf of Mexico on Tuesday. In a few months, students will dive into the Gulf and set the reef balls into a formation to make an artificial reef to attract fish.

Students go reef ball tossing

By KAREN VOYLES
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HORSESHOE BEACH — Small groups of Dixie County High School seniors are slipping out of school this week to toss a semester's worth of work into the Gulf of Mexico.

But instead of being disciplined, the students are being encouraged by their principal to continue their behavior.

The marine science research students are tossing 250-pound, half-round, concrete structures — known as reef balls — that they made this fall into the Gulf about 10 miles southwest of Horseshoe Beach onto a 22-acre site leased to Dixie County.

The first group of students made their reef ball tosses Tuesday in water 22 to

At least 100 reef balls will be put on the reef site in the Gulf before next semester.

25 feet deep, and another group of five students will make their tosses Thursday morning. At least 100 reef balls will be put on the reef site before next semester, when the students will dive into the Gulf and move the reef balls into position to form an artificial reef.

"There's very little natural structure in this area, so this will attract fish of all sizes," said David Osteen, the Horseshoe

Beach resident who has been spearheading efforts to build the reef. Osteen began looking for ways to build a reef in 1993 to attract fish because where there are fish, there are fishermen, and where there are fishermen, there are dollars to be made.

"After the Storm of the Century (March 1993), I saw that we would have to have something more than just commercial fishing in this community," Osteen said. "Then when the net ban started, more people understood that we needed to look for other kinds of business."

In addition to attracting fish and fishermen, the reef is attracting students who want to learn more about how to build a reef. *See REEF on Page 2B*

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United Way of Alachua County