

 SARASOTA BAY

## 4-H Club does its part for bay marine life

Members help make and sink concrete balls in Sarasota Bay to serve as reef habitat.

By Patty Allen-Jones  
Staff Writer

No longer is 4-H Club just about arts and crafts projects or raising farm animals and plants.

On Friday, several members of Sarasota's Ridin Rednecks 4-H Club helped Reef Ball Development Group of Sarasota sink 350- to 400-pound concrete balls in Sarasota Bay to become reef habitat for marine life such as starfish, hermit crabs, oysters and a variety of fish.

Reef Ball is a nonprofit organization that has deployed 50,000 reef balls in waters throughout the world and 2,000 so far in Sarasota Bay.

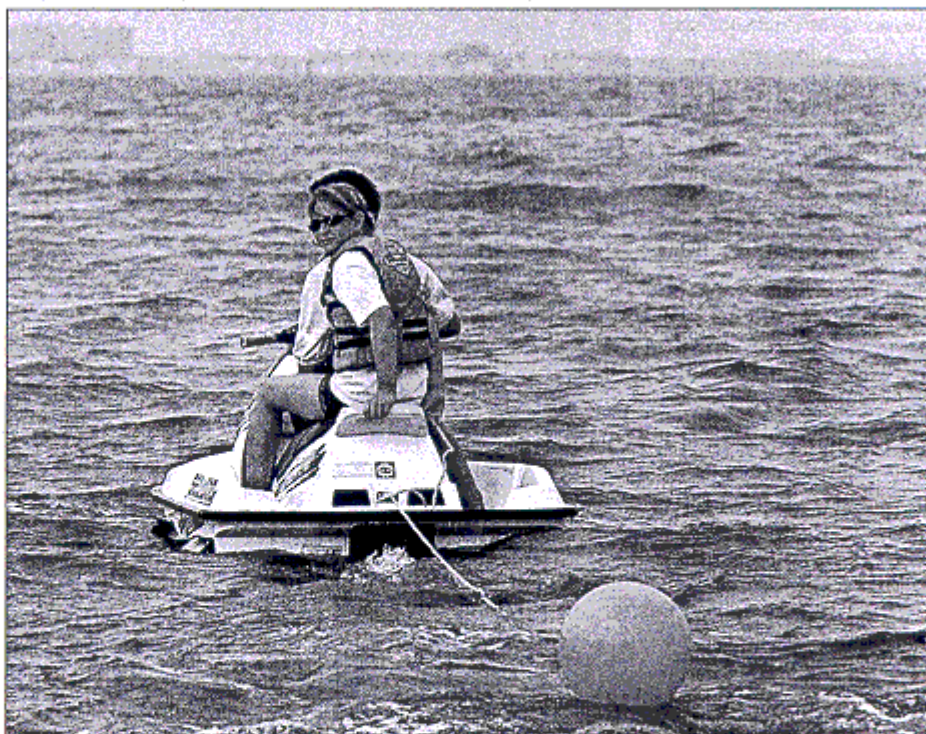
"I think it will be really neat if we get to go scuba diving . . . if we can come out here often and see the progress, making note and taking pictures," said 11-year-old Miriam Fortune. "It will be a good show for the Sarasota County Fair."

Said 11-year-old Danielle Tabar, "I think that it's really interesting, because we can help speed up the process of making a reef and helping repair them."

Fourteen balls, about 3 feet in diameter, were taken by personal watercraft from Sarasota's 10th Street boat ramp and dropped in the water about 100 yards behind the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall and the old Selby Library building.

That area is barren of marine life because of past dredging projects, said Gregg Cohn, who has done other deployment projects with the Reef Ball Development Group.

Ten of the Ridin Rednecks' 35 members volunteered last summer to study marine life, either because they had fish tanks at home or enjoyed being around water, said Marlene Strickland, the group's leader. Until now, their only marine



STAFF PHOTO/MATT BERNHARDT

Rick Harvey, front, and Danielle Tabar tow one of the concrete balls, which is barely visible below an attached buoy. The reef ball was dropped in the water behind the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall.

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**DANIELLE TABAR,**  
4-H Club member

activity had involved using a seine to look for sea life off Lido Beach.

The 4-H'ers placed identification tags on the reef balls, which they also helped make on July 2.

Concrete that had been treated to match the acid level in the salt-water was poured in fiberglass

molds, which contained inflatable balls to make holes in the concrete balls.

Once the balls were completed, buoys inside each ball were inflated. On Friday, after each ball was put in place on the water's surface, the buoy was deflated, sending the

ball to the bottom. A diver then went down to take the deflated buoy off.

The reef balls will last 500 years, said Todd Barber, president of the Reef Ball Development Group. Some of the marine life that will live there will help purify the water, allowing more light to the bottom and ultimately restoring the sea grass.

Six of the 4-H'ers, including Miriam, rode on the backs of personal watercraft that towed the balls from the boat ramp to the deploy-

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