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### Anglers create reef balls for underwater habitat

By PAMELA WOOD, Staff Writer

They're dome-shaped, made of concrete and full of holes. And they'll make a great home for oysters, fish and other critters.

In the searing heat yesterday, a crew of volunteers created the latest set of "reef balls" that they'll sink in the Chesapeake Bay later this summer.

"You get an ecosystem developing on the reef, from microscopic organisms to flora and fauna," said Pete Abbott, vice president of the Annapolis chapter of the Maryland Saltwater Sportfishermen's Association. The group is spearheading the reef ball effort, designed to improve fishing and help the environment.

For the past two weeks and through next week, MSSA volunteers are pouring and "hatching" the reef balls at Discovery Village, an environmental center in Shady Side.

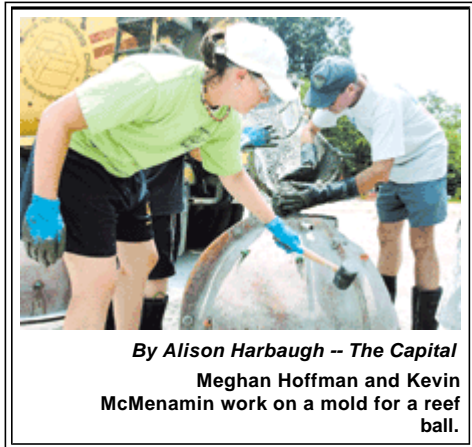
Creating the reef balls involves piecing together round molds and strategically placing inflatable balls inside to create the igloo-like shape and holes of various sizes for fish to swim in and out of.

Once the molds are secure, concrete is poured from a truck via a long chute. Volunteers then follow behind and tap the molds to get rid of any air bubbles.

After drying, the reef balls are "hatched" from the molds, looking something like giant concrete whiffle balls.

It takes about a month of curing before the reef balls are plunked about 35 feet deep in the Chesapeake Bay. The launching point will be just off of Hackett Point on the Broadneck Peninsula.

Once in the water, the reef balls should attract oysters that attach to the surface, and fish and crabs seeking shelter.



By Alison Harbaugh -- The Capital  
Meghan Hoffman and Kevin McMenamin work on a mold for a reef ball.



The lessons weren't lost on a group of Cape St. Claire Elementary School students who helped out yesterday.

Four of the five boys said they like fishing. And all five - Zion Meer, Drew McMenamin, Andre Maddox, Sean McMenamin and Ian Hourican - were able to explain how the reef balls will provide an attractive home for oysters and fish.



The fun of playing with cement out in the sun wasn't lost on them, either.

"It's fun doing it," said Zion, age 9.

"It's hard work," said 7-year-old Sean. "It's something new that we hadn't tried before."



The project has been two years in the making for the fishing club, which got the idea from another chapter.

After two years of planning, the club lined up a \$22,000 grant from the Chesapeake Bay Trust, the nonprofit group that distributes the proceeds from the "Treasure the Chesapeake" license plates.

The fishermen also enlisted the help of Discovery Village, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and the Maryland Environmental Service, an independent state agency that carries out environmental projects.

C.D. Dollar, a spokesman for the statewide MSSA, said the reef ball project is an example of how private citizens can team up with the government and nonprofit groups to take action to improve the bay.

"Government can't do it all and private citizens can't do it all," he said.

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