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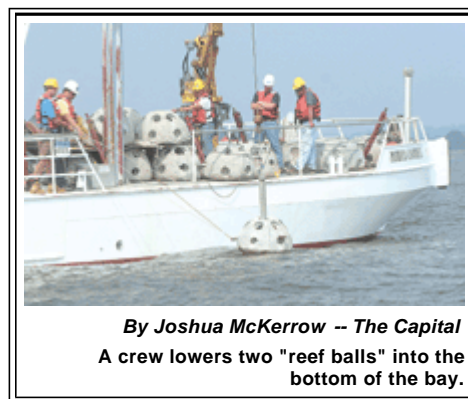
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Fishing group pins hopes on reef balls

By PAMELA WOOD, Staff Writer

Bobbing in a powerboat in the middle of the Chesapeake Bay, Kevin McMenamin watched as the crew on the nearby *Patricia Campbell* started its work for the day.



By Joshua McKerrow -- The Capital
 A crew lowers two "reef balls" into the bottom of the bay.

The men lowered the vessel's huge crane and fastened it to one of the concrete balls stacked on the deck on the custom-designed 60-foot oyster restoration boat.

"They look pretty in the parking lot, but I'm definitely looking forward to having them in the water," Mr. McMenamin said of the oddly shaped structures covered with holes like wiffle balls.

Soon enough, one of the *Patricia Campbell* crew members called out over the speakers, "Go ahead and set it down."

A few moments later, the first of 70 "reef balls" was gently lowered to the bottom of the bay, where hopefully they'll attract marine life, including fish and oysters.

The balls got their start about a month ago at Discovery Village, an educational center in Shady Side, where volunteers from the Maryland Saltwater Sportfishermen's Association poured the concrete into molds to create 140 structures.

After curing, half of the reef balls were loaded onto the *Patricia Campbell* by a team from the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and the Maryland Environmental Service, an independent state agency.

In ones and twos, the balls were placed a few feet apart yesterday on a spot called Dolly's Lump off of Hackett's Point, directly south of the Bay Bridge.

Later this summer, the rest of the association's reef balls will be added to the site. Then the area will be monitored twice in the next year to see if the balls are working as planned.



The uneven concrete surface of the reef balls is designed to offer something for oysters and mussels to attach to and grow. That, in turn, tends to attract fish - rockfish, white perch, croaker.



The project is intended to help marine life in the bay and to boost the flagging oyster population. And it also should help local fishermen, such as association members.

"One of the things you're looking for is marine growth," said Mr. McMenamin, president of the Annapolis chapter of the MSSA. "It creates habitat for the big fish, the bigger fish and the bigger, bigger fish."



The project has been two years in the making, organized by Mr. McMenamin and past president Pete Abbot.

Inspired by another association chapter that completed a similar project, the Annapolis 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 in Shady Side, Herrmann Advertising, the bay foundation, the Maryland Environmental Service and plenty of volunteers.

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