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## Eternal Rest With the Fishes, as a Part of an Artificial Reef

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**O**CEAN CITY, N.J., Sept. 21 - To the many ways Americans can honor the remains of the dearly departed - blasting their ashes into space or freezing the remains or simply sealing the body in a coffin, among others - add one more option: mixing the cremation ashes with marine-grade concrete and forming an artificial reef, a home for the fish and the coral.

So it was that on Tuesday, along with decommissioned Army tanks that have already been lowered to the sandy ocean floor off South Jersey, the mortal remains of three people were interred: Robert I. Aronson, an avid ocean fisherman; Cecelia Schoppaul, who could watch the surf for hours; and Charles M. Wehler, who hated swimming but loved the South Jersey shore.

Their ashes, and those of several others, were mixed with concrete and formed into reef balls, which are hollow concrete cones cast with grapefruit-size holes in them. The balls are widely bought by coastal states - but without human remains - and are used to create fish habitats offshore.

As members of the Aronson, Schoppaul and Wehler families watched from a chartered fishing boat about seven miles off Atlantic City's casino skyline, the towboat Defiant slowly slid the reef balls over the stern and into 50 feet of water. They became part of the Great Egg Reef, one of 14 artificial reefs created by the state.

"I couldn't let go of his ashes - they were the last physical part of him that I had," said Jamie Wehler of Westminster, Md., the widow of Charles Wehler, who died a year ago at 53. "But when I saw an article about this, there was no question in my mind. I don't believe in strange things happening, but everything about this entire trip has been right for me."

Others who had loved ones' ashes cast in reef balls that day spoke of the same sense of wanting to do something tangible with the ashes, besides simply storing them on a mantel or scattering them on the sea.

Kathy Yard recalled the wishes of her mother, Virginia B. Yard, who died on Christmas Eve 2000: "I have dogs that get on my shelves, and she made me promise that I wouldn't make her sit on my shelf. So when we read about this in the paper, we were immediately excited. After all, we all come from the sea, and we're all made up of salt water."

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David Hunsinger for The New York Times  
Jamie Wehler views a reef ball of concrete and her husband's ashes.

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