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Reef memorializes ?Little Joe' Shuford

OUTDOORS

BY TOMMY BRASWELL
The Post and Courier

Early this month, on a beautiful bluebird day, 100 concrete reef balls were positioned at the Charleston 60 artificial reef, the first of several deployments that constitute the 'Little Joe Shuford Reef.'

Organizers hope to eventually deploy some 500 reef balls on the site as a way of memorializing the Mount Pleasant outdoors enthusiast who died March 1 at the age of 20 from a rare form of cancer. Mike Able of Haddrell's Point Tackle in Mount Pleasant said the next batch of 100 reef balls has already been ordered and they are halfway to raising the funds necessary for the second deployment.

During the course of his illness, thousands of us came to know 'Little Joe' vicariously through cars sporting bumper stickers with the words 'Joe's Buddy ? Joe, Fight, Win' alongside a drawing of a tailing redfish. Many people kept abreast of Joe's battle through a website ? www.joesbuddy.com.

The bumper stickers inspired 'Little Joe' as he tried to spot them around town. They were the idea of his girlfriend, Biz Ford, and her father Ted Ford. Thousands were distributed and requests are still being received. During Joe's funeral, the pastor delivering the eulogy mentioned the bumper stickers as a testimony to the young man's faith and fight.

Lisa Hughes, a neighbor of the Shufords, mentioned to 'Big Joe' Shuford that she had read about other states having reefs memorializing individuals. 'Big Joe' was taken with the idea and mentioned it to Able during the visitation.

'I called Bob Martore (reef coordinator for the S.C. Department of Natural Resources) and it was a lot simpler than I expected. They do not memorials at existing reef sites. I called a half dozen friends of Joe and asked if they would onto up so

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to put memorials at existing reef sites. I called a half dozen friends of Joe and asked if they would ante up so jumped on the bandwagon. Before we knew it, we had the first batch pretty much covered. We ordered them Joe's funeral,' Able said. The reef balls cost \$136 each deployed, based on a minimum of 100 reef balls.

Friends rallied to the cause. Sarah Acker and her father put up money to have arm bracelets made up and sold fishing tournaments, through local tackle stores and at other venues, raising approximately \$5,000; East Coop Club donated \$4,500 from its fishing tournament; Able's son took his own money and made up T-shirts to sell

'It took on a life of its own the help of Joe's friends,' Joe said. 'It was a labor of love for all of his friends. I kno tickled pink.'

Reef balls have an estimated life expectancy of at least 500 years. Marine growth quickly attaches to the conc providing habitat for fish. Family friend Greg Miller had a bronze plaque made that read 'In Memory of Joseph Given by Joe's Buddies' which was affixed to the final reef ball deployed.

'We chose the Charleston 60 location because it's fairly close and most of the kids, even with 17- and 18-foot out to the reef on pretty days,' said Able, adding that the next planned deployment will be in June, when Joe's home from school.

Donations for the project can be made by contacting Able at (843) 881-3644 , or sending checks mad Haddrell's Point, 885 Ben Sawyer Blvd., Mount Pleasant, S.C. 29464.

Shuford's family and a number of friends were on hand for the original deployment and said the efforts of thei phenomenal.

'We still have emotional times,' Joe said. 'This was very meaningful to us, to know so many people worked so much in such a short period of time. Betsy ('Little Joe's' mother) and I are proud as we can be.'

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