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Story last updated at 1:19 p.m. on Thursday, October 4, 2001

Cremated remains become part of memorial reef created off Charleston

by **Bruce Smith**
Associated Press

CHARLESTON, S.C. (AP) -- Amid prayers and remembrances, Rose Kovacs had her own prayer answered Wednesday when she looked out on Charleston Harbor and watched a barge carry a big concrete ball out to sea.

The ball bore a plaque containing the names of those whose cremated remains would make up the first community memorial reef created by Eternal Reefs Inc. The remains also were mixed in two dozen other concrete balls that would be sunk offshore as part of a fishing reef.

Those reef balls, some weighing as much two tons, contained the cremated remains of Kovacs' first husband, her second husband and her second husband's first wife.

Kovacs had kept the ashes in her home for years.

"I just kept them in the house, and I just didn't know what I wanted to do," she said. "I just loved this idea because they all loved the ocean and the harbor, and I felt, 'Why not?' I thought this was a prayer answered."

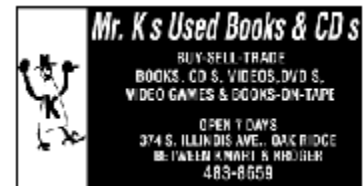
Eternal Reefs, based in Decatur, Ga., made it possible for the remains to be buried at sea.

"I wanted to lay them to rest with the living and all of God's creatures," Kovacs said. "I just thought it was best for my loved ones in this kind of environment rather in a cemetery. Someday I hope to be right next to them out there in the ocean."

As she spoke, members of other families had their pictures taken next to the ball with the plaque. Some made pencil tracings of the plaque on notebook paper.

Don Brawley, an avid diver, founded Eternal Reefs in 1998. Six years earlier, he co-founded Reef Ball Development Group, which developed the concrete balls used as artificial reefs. Approximately 150,000 have been sunk worldwide, he said.

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Eternal Reefs started with a request from Brawley's father-in-law who asked if there was some way he could be buried at sea in a reef.

"He said he'd rather spend eternity down there with all that life and excitement instead of in a field with a lot of dead people," Brawley said.

It costs about \$850 for cremated remains to be buried as part of a community reef. Individual reef balls also are available.

The final resting place of the reef balls are recorded so family members can visit the site, Brawley said.

Mark Smith of McAlister-Smith Funeral Home said memorial reefs are one of several options after cremation. Others possibilities include sending a small portion of the remains into space or using some of the remains in artwork.

The balls will be part of a fishing reef about 2 1/2 miles from the Charleston Harbor jetties, said Bob Martore, reef coordinator for the state Department of Natural Resources. The 25-acre reef is in about 30 feet of water.

One of those whose remains became part of the reef Wednesday was Vince Taylor, a longtime DNR boat captain.

"Your way is the sea, your path is in the deep," Jennie Olbrych, the vicar of St. Peter's Episcopal Church, prayed. "We commit these ashes to the deep and in doing so, we pray that the reef may bring life."

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