

Hoping to improve the ocean's health



Broward College students Eric Smith, left, and Cordel Watt lift a deflated buoy into a large artificial reef mold as part of the Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service project. (Photo by Fallan Patterson)



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Service project creates several artificial reefs

Poseidon, Splash, Dory and Krusty Krab will soon sink to the bottom of the Atlantic and eventually be covered in barnacles and brain coral.

The artificial reefs were constructed and named by **Broward College** oceanography students and volunteers as part of the **Martin Luther King Jr. Day** of Service. The project is a partnership between the Pembroke Pines campus, Kids Ecology Corps and the Reef Ball Foundation.

"The oceanography group has been working with (Operation Reef Ball) creating smaller reef balls," said Elena Rae Schultz, the college's director of academic service learning.

"This is on a larger scale."

Molds of three sizes with inflated buoys on the inside and coated with sugar water were filled with concrete donated by SuperMix.

"It mimics the natural designs," said Larry Beggs, the foundation's vice president. "It's really a jump-start program for coral reefs. The coral will take over."

The molds take 24 hours to set and another month to cure before they can be deployed into the ocean. The eight created Jan. 19 will be dropped off at Golden Beach and Oleta River State Park in North Miami in February.

Eric Smith, a digital media major from Miramar, helped classmate Cordel Watt, a computer science major, lift the large heavy buoys into the middle of the molds before they were inflated. Both take Professor Henri Liauw A Pau's oceanography course.

"I wanted to learn about the ocean and how coral reefs are created," Smith said. "This is a good learning experience for me."

Kids Ecology Corps set up seven educational stations where attendees learned ways natural reefs are damaged and destroyed, how oil spills affect the ocean and why those natural resources need to be protected.

"The general public doesn't prize it. They don't realize how unique coral reefs are and how much we need to protect them," said Joan Starr, the group's CEO. "My personal goal

is to engage parents and kids to learn together."

Marissa Fallenbaum, 17, of Sunrise, worked with several of her classmates from **South Plantation High School**'s environmental service magnet program to create educational presentations for the event.

"We're trying to do fun activities teaching young kids about coral reefs," Fallenbaum said. "They're depleting. Anything humans do affects them."

The artificial reef balls contain holes of various sizes, allowing marine life to grow on or live within it.

"You'll find that 95 percent of the stuff growing on our reefs on the nearby natural reefs," Beggs said.

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