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Eternal Reefs another option for a final resting place

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SOMERS POINT - On April 30, Kim Samuel, of Philadelphia, stirred her grandmother's cremated remains into a bucket of concrete.

The mixture was poured into a rim-like mold, and Samuel decorated the top with shells in preparation for the structure's drop into the ocean on May 2.

Samuel researched Eternal Reefs, an eco-friendly cremation memorial option, while preparing her own will. Months prior, Samuel saw a television show that challenged celebrities Tommy Lee and Ludacris to go into different cities and perform environmentally beneficial challenges.

The show featured eco-friendly burial options similar to Eternal Reefs, and planted the idea of a green burial for Samuels. Her grandmother decided to make the same choice after hearing of Samuel's plans. Samuel and her mother,

Louise Samuel prepared the structure on the Shamrock Towing property in Somers Point. The reefs were dropped Monday off of the coast of Margate.

Eternal Reefs began as a way for founder Don Brawley, a frequent diver, to improve growth of marine sponges and coral reefs after destruction from divers.

Brawley invented a concrete, dome-like structure with gaping holes and perforated edges. The rough edges may look like erosion or damage to the structure, but the rough edges help animals and plant growth cling to the part, and prevent the organisms that create coral reefs from being fed on by larger creatures.

Within six months, the structures cultivate significant growth, Brawley said.

However, the structures weren't used as a burial option until the death of Brawley's father-in-law in 2000. A nature lover, his father-in-law requested being buried in one of the reefs.



Kristen Kelleher/SENTINEL

Kim Samuel, right and her mother Louise decorate Louise's mother's memorial reef with shells.

Soon enough, Brawley was receiving more requests.

"In most cases when some-

one passes away, you meet with funeral director, make a few decisions and step back... What we're finding is people like being involved," Brawley said. "It's a personal tribute they did with their own hands to honor them."

Today, eternal reefs services coastal locations range from Texas to New Jersey. Eternal Reefs travels to coastal locations up and down the East Coast for reef memorials. Memorials are

contingent upon seasonal weather conditions and proximity to the shore, Brawley said. Eternal Reefs can only prepare wreaths in locations less than 20 miles offshore.

The process takes four days to complete. The first day, relatives and friends are invited to mix loved ones' remains with a concrete mixture, which will be poured on top of the dome into a ring-shaped mold. Guests have the opportunity to decorate the rims with personal sentiments, and the concrete hardens overnight.

Susan and Tom Heard, of Easton, Pa., placed Yu-Gi-Oh! cards into the mixture that had belonged to their son, David, 10. David died in February 2010 from neuroblastoma, which he battled from age 8.

Everything placed in the mixture held significance, Susan Heard explained. One sand dollar from Maine represented frequent family vacations to a spot famous for plentiful sand dollars. The Heard's had never had much luck finding them, she joked,

but David loved the family's time swimming off of the coast of Maine.

A dart from David's Nerf gun collection and a paper crane were also present. David and his family watched the play "A Thousand Cranes," the story of a girl who survived the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and contracted leukemia. She learns of the Japanese legend that grants the folder of 1000 origami cranes one wish.

David decided to make crane mobiles for the hospitals he had been treated at, each with 1000 cranes per mobile. His parents and friends, in conjunction with Lafayette College, have continued the National Crane Project.

In addition to the shells, Samuel carved the words "Mr. Limpet" into the rim atop her grandmother's reef.

It's from an old movie her grandmother liked, Samuel said, about a man who was knocked into the ocean and became a fish.