

Florida company utilizes human remains to create coral reefs for memorials

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A Florida company is giving families a new option to memorialize their loved ones while helping the environment.

Sarasota-based Eternal Reefs offers memorials by incorporating a person's cremated remains with a reef ball and submerging in onto the ocean floor.

"We've worked with more than 3,000 families, and the entire process is designed to involve the family in the memorialization process," Eternal Reefs CEO George Frankel told USA TODAY.

Frankel said a family can be involved by mixing the cremated remains into concrete, adding handprints, written messages and non-invasive mementos like coins their loved one had traveled with or military metals.

“Sometimes you can really tell who the person was in life by the materials left as mementos,” Frankel said.

The reef ball design was started by a group of divers at the University of Georgia in the 1980’s, according to Frankel. When they saw the degradation of coral reefs, they came up with the design that looks like a “whiffle ball cut in half.”

The reef ball is made of a pH-neutral concrete, with 80% of its weight concentrated in the lower 40% to make the reef stable. Frankel said storm energy will pass around, through and over the reef balls due to their hollow and vented design.

Mother Nature has two questions when you're putting materials in the ocean, Frankel said.

“One, will it stay where it’s put? Because if it’s not going to stay where it’s put then it’s more dangerous than it is good. The second thing is, is it made of material Mother Nature wants to work with?”

Frankel was working with one of the divers who promised his father to put his cremated remains with the reef when the idea resonated with him — memorial reefs.



With social media as a tool, in recent years Eternal Reefs has offered a different way to memorialize loved ones besides a burial or cremation.

Since the beginning of COVID-19 pandemic, Frankel said his company has been inundated with requests for information. The price of the reef can range from \$2,500 to \$7,500, depending on the size and family involvement.

So far, 2,500 Eternal Reefs have been placed off the coasts of Florida, Maryland, New Jersey, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas and Virginia.

“All of a sudden here comes this concept of using memorialization as a tool to improve the marine environment,” Frankel said. “People will be able to choose between several different options that will enhance the environment, and I think that’s great.”

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