

Loved ones find final resting place in the Gulf

by Danielle Apolinar

Friday, September 13th 2019

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PENSACOLA, Fla. (WEAR) — Twelve families began the process of laying their loved ones to rest at sea on Friday morning. They memorialized their family members and friends in artificial reefs through Eternal Reefs.

George Frankle, with the organization says they have given people this option for 20 years.

"It means a lot, it means something to memorialize a loved one. It's more than a memorial, it's a tribute you've made with your own hands," Frankle said.

The commemoration is a way to bring life after death. The reefs, once placed under water, can begin growth of an ecosystem in as little as three months.

The families mixed their cremated loved ones in cement, which became a part of the "reef ball" structure. After casting, the families decorated the reefs with personal items and shiny trinkets to attract the fish.

Rick and Joyce Deal came to include Shirley Ocker, a retired Air Force nurse. The Deals met Ocker as they did charity work and ultimately became her caretaker for 15 years. They know this is the proper send off.

"We're celebrating her love for the water and dolphins, whales she had a ton of those pictures in her house. She wanted to be somewhere out in the water. She would approve, there's a lot of purple," Deal said.

It's a way to heal, honor and remember while also coming together.

"All 5 of our loved ones are in one reef and that's really positive for us," said participant William Bryant.

Sharon Meharg and Lynsey McAnally came out to include Captain Ken Meharg, a beloved charter boat captain and respected teacher in Pensacola.

"To be with all these other families and to end in the way he would have wanted this all to end is pretty perfect," McAnally said.

They say this final stop couldn't be more appropriate.

"He'll see the fish swimming by and that's what he always said he wanted to be where he could see a snapper swimming by," Meharg said.

An ecosystem can start growing on these reefs in as little as three months.

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So unique! Eternal Reefs works to remember loved ones through making them apart of artificial reefs that will bring life for years to come. The Deals came to remember retired Air Force nurse Shirley Ocker. They became her caretakers after meeting her through Meals on Wheels.



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