

## **FISHING TOURNAMENT TO BENEFIT ARTIFICIAL REEF PROGRAM**

By Ed Killer

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A fleet of fishing boats, including the Safari I party boat, will set out from St. Lucie Inlet on Saturday carrying anglers to sea. Their quarry will be dolphin, kingfish, wahoo, grouper, snapper and cobia.

Their reward will be threefold: In addition to fillets for the table, and cash prizes for the winners, the anglers also will generate funding for the creation of future underwater fish habitat.

The annual Reef Builders Tournament will start with its captain's meeting and kickoff party Friday, beginning at 6 p.m. The affair will take place at FINZ Waterfront Grille at 4290 S.E. Salerno Road in Port Salerno.

The weigh-in will be 2 to 4 p.m. Saturday on the dock at FINZ. The awards dinner will begin at 6 p.m. at FINZ.

The Reef Builder offers an unique opportunity for anglers to participate who do not have access to a boat. A limit of 20 anglers will be able to fish offshore aboard the Safari I party boat that day. It's very likely that the winning snapper, grouper, cobia or kingfish could be reeled in over the rail. Pre-registration is required and the cost is \$100. To get aboard call (772) 334-4411.

Boats can enter for \$250 until Wednesday before the entry fee goes to \$275. Of course, the more boats that enter, the better for Martin County's Artificial Reef Program.

The prizes are \$1,000 for first place, \$500 for second and \$250 for third in each species category. The prizes are guaranteed, thanks to strong participation from sponsors that understand the value of a well-organized reef program.

The tournament organizing committee, led by John Burke and Dave Powell, has everything in place for another fine event. All that's needed now are anglers.

“We have no idea how many boats will enter,” said Burke, who helped co-found the MCAC Reef Fund in 2002 prior to the acquisition and deployment of the Wickstrom Reef on Jan. 21, 2003. “Last year, we raised \$12,000 and this year we hope to raise \$15,000 to \$20,000, if we can.”

Artificial reef programs in Martin and St. Lucie counties have been thriving for the past several years despite a struggling economy and shrinking public funding. Convincing benefactors to buy naming rights for an artificial reef has helped offset the expense of acquiring materials, preparing them and deploying them to the bottom of the ocean.

On June 8, the Stuart Corinthian Yacht Club celebrated the placement of a steel sign on the concrete rubble piled in 185 feet of water.

The club had fundraisers and a month-long fishing tournament to raise \$9,000 for the rights. More than 70 SCYC members aboard seven boats attended the sign placement at the reef site. They even fired a cannon to mark the moment.

“The day we went to place the sign, the Lady Stuart and about 20 other boats were fishing the area where the reef is,” Burke said. “It

really shows that the angling community has an appreciation for the work we've been doing.”

The SCYC Reef was one of three rubble piles deployed last year. The other two reefs are named Pirates Cove Resort and Marina, and Ballantrae Anglers Club. In January, real estate developer Ted Glasrud was at the site to watch a steel tug boat sink to the bottom to become a reef that now bears his name.

The construction of artificial reefs creates habitat for marine organisms and fish. Being able to maintain a working reef program is a way to maintain the Treasure Coast's legacy as a top notch sport fishing destination.

That helps the area's overall economy in general.

But the final line in a poem written for the occasion by SCYC member Perez better explains the value of a reef.

“Imagine how barren the sea would be without the reefs and the life they breed,” the poem says.

To learn more about the fourth annual Reef Builders Tournament, visit [www.mcacreeffund.org](http://www.mcacreeffund.org) or call (772) 708-8881. To learn more about Martin County reefs, visit [www.martinreefs.com](http://www.martinreefs.com)

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