

Ed Killer: Glasrud Reef becomes latest flagship of Treasure Coast artificial reef efforts



- By Ed Killer
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Capt. Jim Hardee, skipper of the Challenge, smiled and pointed at the colorful fishfinder to the left of his wheel. A large school of bait fish, depicted in bright colors of red, orange and yellow against the screen's royal blue background, were marking 100 feet deep in 185 feet of water. "They're down there waiting for their new home to show up," Hardee joked.

Their new home arrived about an hour later. As habitats go, the new Glasrud Reef is pretty sweet.

It is 69 feet in length, 42 feet in height and built of good old American steel. Already, Goliath groupers are touring the site, checking out the neighborhood. Red snappers are talking about how nice the windows are. Greater amberjacks have started staking out the superstructure.

Hardee had positioned the charter fishing vessel in the front row of the viewing gallery for one of the more interesting aspects of marine life on the Treasure Coast: The sinking of a boat. The Big Al, a tug boat collected by American Custom Yachts as a repo and donated to the MCAC Reef Fund for deployment as an artificial reef, drew a pretty fair crowd considering the weather forecast Wednesday.

But the story of the sinking itself was as much of a challenge as the 18-month process to get the tug boat ready to go to the bottom of the sea.

Sea conditions were a fair 2 to 4 feet and building. The only reason the seas were manageable was because the wind direction was out of the southwest. There was a steady north current in 187 feet of water where the tug boat was sunk.

Sinking a boat to become a reef is not as simple as it sounds. Drop it in the wrong spot, and one reef might land on top of another. Drop it the wrong way, and the reef's use may never be maximized by the sea life it is designed to help.

Let me say, it's no easy task towing a 30,000 pound boat without steerage or power to a location on the deep blue sea where it must be dropped into a spot 187 below within a few hundred feet one way or the other.

Capt. Frank Masters and his crew with McCulley Marine Services had a serious challenge battling the weather alone. The same time Masters and consultant Kerry Dillon struggled to ensure that everything would be completed correctly — and safely — a squall line blew off the mainland whipping up sloppy seas and sending showers. Fortunately, there was no hail or waterspouts nine miles northeast of St. Lucie Inlet.

The fact that Masters' men were able to position the tug correctly, pump the fuel tanks full of seawater, remove the pumps, pull the plugs and then get off the tug and onto the work boats in waves about four feet without anyone getting hurt shows how careful and conscientious the men were.

If one life is jeopardized by a project like this, it's not worth it. Masters made sure that was not an issue.

So how long does it take to sink a boat? An hour? Two? Ten?

It took about 70 minutes once they began pumping seawater into the fuel tanks. About 40 minutes once that was finished.

According to underwater video captured by a camera mounted on the tug's railing, the trip from surface to sea floor in 187 feet took only 18 seconds.

Ted Glasrud became a huge benefactor to the MCAC Reef Fund. In the past two years, many have stepped forward to gain naming rights for reef structures being placed along our shores.

It's a donation towards the future of strong recreational fishing on the Treasure Coast.

If you are someone who agrees with this philosophy, contact one of the local reef programs and become an asset.

SEE THE REEF IN PLACE

Get a rare "fish eye's view" of the new Glasrud Reef by viewing a photo gallery using photos taken by diver and reef consultant Kerry Dillon about 90 minutes after the sinking. The gallery can be viewed on TCPalm.com.

Also on TCPalm.com there is also video and a photo gallery of the sinking taken from above the waves. To view a short video taken from the video camera mounted on the tug's railing visit

www.tisiri.org.

LEARN MORE

To become a reef partner or to learn more information about the MCAC Reef Fund, visit

www.martinreefs.com.

To learn more about St. Lucie County reefs, visit www.stlucieco.gov, go to Public Works and search for artificial reefs.

For information on Indian River County reefs, visit www.ircgov.com, public works and coastal engineering.

QUOTES OF THE WEEK

Elaine Moore, of the Port Salerno Dock Authority, during Wednesday's protest by fishermen against federal fishing laws, and not long after a severe hail storm and a waterspout temporarily drove protesters from the Roosevelt Bridge in Stuart:

"See what happens when you get a bunch of fishermen together to voice their opinion, all hail breaks loose," she said.

Capt. Jim Hardee of the Challenge Sportfishing Boat, during Wednesday's sinking of the Big Al tugboat, while speculation about how fast the tug would sink was discussed by observers of the event:

"It never fails: When you don't want something to sink, it does; when you do want it to sink, it won't. It has something to do with that fellow Murphy being around," he said.

Ed Killer is a columnist for Scripps Treasure Coast Newspapers. This column reflects his opinion. For more on Outdoors and Fishing topics, follow his blog at www.tcpalm.com/killer.

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