

## **Our Underwater Desert in Martin County**

**\*Powell, D, Vice-President MCAC Reef Fund, Inc.**

There are records dating back to the 1970's showing materials being deployed for artificial reefs in Martin County's vast deepwater desert. Permitted areas have been charted since then and named Donaldson, Ernst & Sirotkin in honor of fishing enthusiasts known as "Reeftirees". Local businesses, civic groups and volunteers were building an underwater metropolis for marine life. Over the years, divers Dr. Lee Harris, Kerry Dillon, Merle Stokes and others performed still and video underwater photography. Their documentation verifies the artificial reef locations and monitors the condition of the reef materials. Reports are available on the MartinReefs.com website.

MCAC Reef Fund, Inc. was established in 2002 as a 501(C3) corporation (mcacreeffund.org) to enhance the artificial reef program of Martin County. The selling of naming rights generates cash for the fund and all proceeds go towards artificial reefs. Members are John Burke, founder and president, Dave Powell, vice-president, and members Curt Croteau, Kerry Dillon, Joe Lehner and Karl Wickstrom. Our goal is *"to obtain suitable vessels and materials to make artificial reefs in the deep waters of Martin County to improve recreational fishing, the offshore environment and tourism"*. There are dozens of volunteers involved with our projects and fund raising events. We have had 3 very successful fishing tournaments and are busy selling the naming rights to future or existing unnamed artificial reefs. The fund works closely with Martin County to insure our long term strategy meets both of our goals.

In 2003 new materials were added to the deep water (150-190 ft) of the Sirotkin Site including a ship (Wickstrom), a tug (High Queen) and concrete railroad ties. Our recent successes include four 37' tall obsolete steel Navy towers built and donated by Harbor Branch Institute in Fort Pierce. The towers are named Baratta Sight-Sea-Er, Debbie Schmidt, American Custom Yachts and Bausch American Towers. Six new reefs were deployed offshore in south county located midway between St. Lucie and Jupiter Inlets. All six reefs have new names: The Heap, Jack MacDonald, Shirley, Lentine, Fogel Capital Management and Ann Marie. All are local people interested in contributing to the program! Their generous contributions cover our deployment costs.

This year's new project is the tug "BIG AL" donated by American Custom Yachts. This 69' 1954 vintage coastal tug's propeller was sold for \$3,000.00 and after a year of local contractors cleaning up the vessel, it's ready to go. The naming rights were purchased by a local businessman, Mr. Ted Glasrud, covering nearly the entire cost of the project. The BIG AL will be deployed south of the Wickstrom, by a local tug operator, creating a long north-south reef along with the 3 new 500 ton concrete rubble reefs out there looking for new names! Right now they are known as Alpha, Beta & Charlie. This year we published a brochure with reef names, latitude, longitude, water depth, and distance from the St. Lucie Inlet. It includes a location map listing all 62 artificial reefs for fishing and diving. This ongoing program of new artificial reefs is our welcome mat for migrating fish of all kinds to remain and enjoy the hospitality offered in Martin County's underwater desert. Our vision is that future generations will be blessed with an abundance of offshore marine life due to our foresight and dedication.