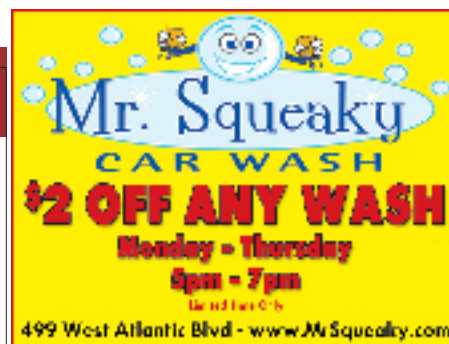


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Friday, August 23, 2013 - Vol. XXI, Issue 34

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Commissioners dive in to observe progress of artificial reef



Commissioners in Lauderdale-By-The-Sea held an underwater meeting Saturday to get an upclose look at the town's Biorock reef. They were pleased to see growth on the reef and juvenile fish attracted to the area. [Photo courtesy of Alan Dewey]

By Judy Vik

PELICAN STAFF

Lauderdale-By-The-Sea – Town commissioners took to the sea on Saturday for a snorkeling outing to the town's Biorock artificial reef. Leading the way was Dr. Thomas Goreau of the Global Coral Reef Alliance, who described the reef as "an oasis of life" and said it is doing very well.

The town contracted with Alliance over several years to construct, monitor and maintain the reef, south of the pier and 250 yards east of the Windjammer Resort in 12 feet of water.

The Biorock reef uses two solar buoys to feed a low-level electric current to a steel rebar structure 15 feet below the surface. The current helps to grow limestone rock structures to increase the rate of coral growth.

Pieces of coral, naturally broken off other reefs, have been transplanted onto the biorock reef.

Before they ventured into the ocean off the Datura Avenue Portal, Goreau noted that LBTS is the only place in the continental USA where snorkel

can be done just offshore.

Goreau reminded the commissioners that it took five years to obtain all the necessary permits for the Biorock reef.

He said corals have been steadily dying for the last 20 years. Now growth can be seen where some coral pieces have cemented themselves onto the structure. The new areas are bright white. Corals grow at the rate of a quarter inch a year.

Hundreds of juvenile fish are now seen around the reef looking for coral.

"They weren't there until we had this structure," Goreau said.

The solar panels, which power the structure, get sun for six hours a day. More power would provide more sun and more growth, he said.

Before they reached the bioreef, Goreau said they would see the "Swiss cheese formation," the remains of old tree trunks where lobsters hide.

That area is a great nursery for juvenile eels, nurse sharks and trumpet fish, said Jose Muniz, diving with his son Ryan, 10. Muniz said his family comes to the area from Coral Springs several times a week. "You can't beat the shore diving around here. It's fantastic. And you can't beat the price.

It's free!"

Vice Mayor Scot Sasser, accompanied by his son Jake, said "That was a blast. Jake saw a spotted eagle ray."

Commissioner Stuart Dodd said, it was "very nice, very enjoyable. There is an abundance of fish, a very good indicator of what we can look forward to in the future."

"The coral is growing, albeit very slowly," Dodd said. "We should see an increase with an increase in electricity. We will look into that, if we can raise some money or get some kind of grant money. That would allow more structures and a longer and better reef."

Mayor Roseann Minnet called the snorkeling expedition "great, an amazing experience." She said she hoped the town can keep the project growing. "It's a very positive thing."

Minnet said a lot can be seen with snorkeling equipment.

"There is minimal growth now, but it looks like it has potential," said Commissioner Chris Vincent. "Divers will see growth year in and year out."

Four of the five commissioners took part in the outing. Commissioner Mark Brown was out of town.

