

CherokeeLife

Woodstock office helps save world's coral reefs

By Mike Stucka

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Artificial coral reefs have about as much to do with Woodstock as they do with Switzerland — quite a bit, as it turns out.

For several years, an international non-profit organization associated with efforts to restore the world's oceans has been working quietly from a Woodstock office. The organization, the Reef Ball Foundation, is working to help build new coral reefs worldwide and educate people about the dangers facing the reefs, hosts to the ocean's life.

That task has brought Executive Director Kathy Kirby from Aruba and Belize to Switzerland, where she had the unlikely job of demonstrating, in an alpine lake, how the strange-looking concrete blobs can help start artificial reefs. Though home to large numbers of divers, Switzerland is not known for its oceanic reef systems.

"Cold-water diving is not my favorite thing," laughed Kirby.

The reef ball concept uses formed concrete weighing up to 6,000 pounds to start reefs. The igloo-shaped reef balls are hollow and have dozens of holes through them and use special concrete mixtures to promote growth. The now-patented idea is an improvement over when Kirby's college friend Todd Barber first experimented with chicken wire and balloons to make the balls. Malaysia is now considering putting in 100,000 reef balls.

Kirby said her motivation is simple.

"I've been diving since I was 12, and just seeing the degradation at the same reefs in my lifetime is how I got interested," she said.

Estimates by the World Resources Institute indicate that 58 percent of the world's coral



reefs are at medium or high risk from pollution, overexploitation, development and other problems.

It's in her talks with schoolchildren, such as those at one Marietta school, which Kirby said makes her feel like she's making a difference. She estimated she got 100 letters or notes from just that one visit, in which she spoke about the importance of coral reefs and why they should be protected.

"It'll make you think about a real reef, which takes 100 years to be a good size, and you can destroy it almost just by touching it," she said.

The work of the Reef Ball Foundation spans the world, from an artificial coral reef off the coast of Florida named in memory of

Kirbo's father to the Dominican Republic, which had its natural reefs largely destroyed by a rare hurricane. The work from the Woodstock and Sarasota, Fla., offices is 70-percent overseas, with any number of languages and accents. Sometimes, those communication problems make for interesting trips.

In Belize, Kirby and some coworkers were told they were going to the beach. They arrived, in swimsuits, at the Beach — the nickname for a university where they then had to give presentations, Kirby recalled.

Aside from the humor, Kirby said the Reef Ball Foundation makes a difference by preserving something of biological importance to the entire ecosystem, the beautiful coral



The Woodstock-based Reef Ball Foundation helps take reef balls (pictured above) and turn them into artificial reefs (pictured left).

Contributed photos

reefs. A 1999 report shows the Foundation worked on one project with more than 1,000 people from schools and community groups, spending some \$47,000 to deploy 1,000 reef balls. The Foundation's Web page describes the ongoing efforts in Malaysia to protect sea turtles and other aquatic life.

Kirbo said the foundation and reef balls have come a long way since she took an extra diving class in college and met Barber, the president, there. The long, difficult class gave even the seasoned divers knowledge that may have saved their lives a few times already.

"It worked out," she said with a laugh.

For information on the Foundation, see www.reefball.org. For information on the plight of coral reefs, visit www.coralreef.noaa.gov.

New year brings chance to donate and deduct

By Misty Williams

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It may be too late to donate clothing and household items to charity for a tax write-off for 2000, but it is never too early to start for this year.

With the beginning of 2001, many people made the ever famous New Year's resolution to lose weight. If you happen to be one of the very few who actually do, or one of the many who don't, why not load up all those clothes in the closet that no longer fit and donate them to charity.

Cherokee County boasts numerous charities who need all types of items, including household appliances, computers and even your old cell phones or vehicles.

By donating, and doing it right, a family can save hundreds of dollars each year when Uncle Sam comes knocking for tax dollars.

"You're better off to give it to a charity than to the government in the end," says Terry Lawson of Lawson Accounting and Tax.

Most of his clients, like many people, only donate a few hundred dollars each year, he said.

"There are exceptions. Some people give thousands to their church," he said, adding that that is also tax deductible. "Most people though, do not take advantage

Follow these guidelines suggested by various charitable organizations and accountants:

•**First and foremost**, make sure the organization is above board and it has a tax-exempt status. To find out about a charity, visit the Secretary of State's Web site at www.sos.state.ga.us. One can also find out how much money collected goes to the charity.

•**Assign a price amount to all items donated.** Books and Web sites can help one find amounts for items donated. Another rule of thumb to follow is take 25 percent of the original amount paid for the item. If you are unsure, check with your accountant.

•**Document the donation with a receipt**, and a photo or a video. Keep both in your tax file in case the IRS needs proof. It is also helpful to know the date, or at least a time frame of when the original items were purchased, and the condition they were in when donated.

•**The value of the contribution** cannot be more than 50 percent of your adjusted gross income. If it exceeds this, the remaining amount can be deducted over the next five years.

•**If the amount donated is under \$500**, report the deduction on Schedule A of Form 1040. If it is over \$500, Form 8283 must be filed with a tax return.

of donations."

On average, if a family falls into the 28 percent tax bracket, as many do, a \$100 deduction can save as much as \$28 in federal taxes and \$6 in state taxes, he said. Lawson does warn that there are many different variables in calculating returns and advises if some-

one has a question to contact their accountant.

Some organizations in Cherokee County who are always in need of help include the following:

Bethany Place/Merismos
East Cherokee Drive, Canton
(770) 479-9462

www.bethanyhomeplace.org

This is a non-profit, long term home for women and children who "desire to break the cycle of their past and to heal the wounds of fear and low self worth." They have helped over 900 women and children since it was organized 12 years ago. The organization is always looking for clothing for women and children, said Director Sandy Reed. What they need most at the time is a van. Six women and nine children call Bethany Place home and they have no transportation, she said.

MUST, Ministries United for Service and Training Inc.

141 W. Marietta St., Canton
(770) 479-5397

MUST helps people in Cherokee and lower Pickens county by providing clothing and household items, along with food. They also help clothe students and assist with rent and utilities to those in need. The ministry has received everything from toilets to beds to coffee makers, said Andy Peadody, assistant director. Specific needs always includes good-quality mattresses and beds, along with linens. Clothing for all sizes and both male and female are always accepted, but he warns that all items donated need to be in good enough condition so they can be

immediately distributed. "We just don't have the time to repair items," explained Peadody. On a side note, two items desperately needed by MUST are socks and underwear. While for good reason, most people do not donate the items used, he said if people are out shopping, they could always pick up a package of the items and donate it.

Goodwill drop-off site

Blalock Road, Canton
(770) 516-4195

Goodwill helps people with disabilities and other disadvantaging conditions with employment and training services. Cherokee County has a manned drop off site for Goodwill near Canton. For a list of items that Goodwill takes or does not take, and other drop off sites, visit its Web site at www.ging.org

Also, many churches help needy people and accept clothing and household items. One of the largest around is First Baptist Church of Woodstock's Clothing Ministry. For more information on this, call (770) 591-2646.

Also, Radio Shack locations are collecting used cell phones to donate to women who are involved in Call to Protect. The phones will be programmed with 911 and an emergency contact number only.