



MEDIA ADVISORY

October 6, 2020

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Friends of Our Florida Reefs Partners with Nova Southeastern University to Install a New Living Florida's Coral Reef Exhibit at the Marine Environmental Education Center in Hollywood, FL

Broward County, Florida -- To better educate the public about the wonders, beauty, and threats to Florida's coastal water ecosystems, several notable organizations are partnering to add the first of three large exhibit tanks by the popular "Captain" Sea Turtle Pool at Nova Southeastern University's (NSU) Marine Environmental Education Center ([MEEC at the Carpenter House in Hollywood, Florida](#)). Focusing on Florida's Coral Reef, the first 300+ gallon tank is anticipated to be up and running by early 2021. This coral reef exhibit will feature live native corals, fish, and invertebrates. Two additional exhibit tanks are planned to focus on the critical importance of mangroves and sea grasses.

"This project fits right in with the mission of the MEEC," said Derek Burkholder, Ph.D., research scientists and director of the center. "Educating the public about our marine environments is vital and by bringing attention to the plight of our coral reefs, we're adding a new dimension to our outreach efforts."

Initial funding was spearheaded by the regional nonprofit organization, Friends of Our Florida Reefs (FOFR – www.floridareef.org). Generous donors have already committed \$7,500 to FOFR to kick start a challenge match campaign for the exhibit. By the end of 2020, FOFR hopes to contribute at least \$15,000 depending upon additional public donations towards the budget for the living coral reef tank and detailed informational signage. Gifts of any size may be donated directly to FOFR (via the website, Facebook page, or mail) for the match challenge. Donors contributing \$100 or more for the MEEC reef tank match will be invited to submit names for established coral colonies living along the southeast Florida reefs, and donors contributing \$250 or more will have the opportunity to submit names for a limited number of corals to be placed in the MEEC tank. Nova Southeastern University's MEEC will provide additional funding and expert maintenance, while also fundraising for the remaining two tanks to highlight local mangrove and seagrass communities.

"As with coral reefs around the Earth, Florida's long-lived corals have come under considerable stress over the last 30 years. It's critical that we do all we can to increase public awareness and appreciation of these living treasures, and reduce many man-made stressors on what remains healthy and restorable" said FOFR Co-founder Scott Sheckman. Melissa Sathe, FOFR's President, adds "Florida's Coral Reef has been decimated by stony coral tissue loss disease, a serious outbreak that started in 2014. We are excited to partner with NSU which is on the forefront of disease research and reef restoration to bring awareness to our beautiful reefs."

FOFR is the dedicated Citizen Support Organization for the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) Coral Reef Conservation Program, which manages the northern section of Florida's Coral Reef from the St. Lucie Inlet to the northern border of Biscayne National Park. DEP also co-manages the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary with NOAA. DEP is working alongside NSU/MEEC to create the new displays for the first exhibit tank. As another part of its educational mission, DEP recently launched <https://floridascoralreef.org> to help highlight this vital natural resource enjoyed by millions of residents and visitors. The new website also recognizes the many organizations working diligently around the local counties, state and nation to help protect and save this national treasure – the only living barrier reef along the continental USA, and one of the largest living reefs in the world!

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About the Marine Environmental Education Center (MEEC): The center was opened with the desire to educate and delight locals and tourists alike through our “forever ambassador” green sea turtle, Captain, and the splendor of the coastal environment of South Florida. The MEEC was fostered from a partnership between Broward County Parks and Recreation and NSU, and is located on the historic grounds of the Carpenter House at Hollywood North Beach Park in Hollywood, FL. Along with Captain, the site features an interactive Interpretive Center with displays ranging on topics from sea turtle conservation to marine debris. Additionally, the center offers programs for the public on various coastal ecology and sea turtle topics, as well as programming specifically for school groups with a curriculum tailored to the marine sciences. Please visit cnso.nova.edu/carpenter-house-meec for more information

For more information about FOFR's role in this important education project, please contact Melissa Sathe listed at the top of this Media Advisory. For NSU, please contact: Alissa Hechter at ah833@nova.edu/954-262-2408. For MEEC: Dr. Derek Burkholder dburkholder@nova.edu/954-262-3673. For the FDEP Coral Reef Conservation Program: Michelle Gaulty at Michelle.Gaulty@floridadep.gov/305-795-1222.