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Martin County, Florida gains new artificial reef thanks to community support

Four navy towers, deployed June 27, will provide habitat for fish, deepwater coral

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The Martin County Anglers' Club (MCAC) Artificial Reef Fund was created several years ago to enhance Martin County, Florida's artificial reef program. In order to secure the funding needed to meet their goals, the MCAC Reef Fund launched their annual reef tournament last summer. Local businesses American Custom Yachts (ACY) and Bausch American Towers (BAT) were proud to be Gold Sponsors of the event. This year, these two businesses decided to kick it up a notch and purchase naming rights to two of four steel towers that recently became Martin County's newest artificial reef. The other two towers were sponsored by Martin County residents Dr. Robert Baratta and Debbie Schmidt. This new reef is composed of four 33-foot-tall steel towers donated by the U.S. Navy and modified for deployment by Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute at Florida Atlantic University.

On June 27, the towers were dropped off the coast of Martin County in 200 feet of water, south of Wickstrom Reef and parallel to Eight Mile Reef, under the direction of the Martin County Coastal Engineering Department.

The goal of the artificial reef program is to improve the fishing and diving in the waters off of Martin County. The location of the Towers was chosen to fill in the gap between neighboring reefs and to promote the growth of a rare, deepwater coral in the *Oculina* genus. This type of coral, commonly known as the ivory tree coral, is slow-growing and very delicate. It is often associated with areas of high biodiversity, as it provides ideal spawning sites for numerous species of reef-dwelling fish, including economically important species such as groupers and snappers. The reef will also attract many pelagic species as well, including sailfish, wahoo and dolphin.