



Water Side of Scenic 98

# Eagle Reef Project Update

📅 Jul 26, 2023 ⌚ 15 min read



On Tuesday, July 18, a big announcement was made at a press conference held at Julep Point at the Grand Hotel, regarding The Eagle Reef Project. You may

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recall the story of [John Shell](#), who took on the task of placing manufactured mini-reefs under wharves and piers around the Scenic 98 Coastal area, to help facilitate the growth of oysters and barnacles that, in turn, would filter water and attract fish and crabs.

John began this project to earn his Eagle Scout badge. It was an aggressive undertaking which he researched extensively to determine the best way to be successful. John grew up along the waters around Mobile, Gulf Shores, and Soldiers Creek where he enjoyed fishing and spending time on the water. By age 17, he realized that there needed to be a solution to protect and clean the water to support the fish population. Thus, the Eagle Reef Project was born.

With the loss of natural oyster and grass beds and the subsequent loss of fish species, these mini-reefs are one way to grow bivalves and filter the water. The bivalves, (oysters and barnacles), can filter up to fifty gallons of water daily. Fish and crabs are attracted to the reefs, and the eco-friendly system has been proven to work.

John's research led him to a company in Florida, [Ocean Habitat](#), and Dr. David Wall, who manufactures mini-reefs that are easy to install. His project required him to raise funds to purchase reefs and then locate places along the coastline to place them. Most of the reefs found homes under the piers of private residents who offered to buy the reefs that John and his Scouting friends would install.

Initially, John set out to place 50 mini-reefs. Incredibly, he raised \$52,000 in one summer and installed 175 reefs by the end of his Eagle Reef Project. Yes, he did earn his Eagle Scout badge! But the story doesn't end here. John's dad, Jeb Shell decided to pick up where John left off and found community partners that would help facilitate placing a total of 1000 reefs along the shore.

Tuesday's press conference was to announce a huge initiative to place the mini-reefs under the piers and docks of private individuals, marinas, restaurants, and other structures in Mobile and Baldwin counties. The Eagle Reef Project is partnering with Partners for Environmental Progress (PEP) and The University of South Alabama's Marine and Environmental Sciences Department to raise funds and complete the project.

Formed in 2000, [PEP](#) has 22 corporate partners from around the area and its mission is to improve the quality of life all along the Gulf Coast by prioritizing science-based environmentally sustainable practices through common sense and advocacy. Tom Bramlette spoke on behalf of the organization stating the organization has recently formed the PEP Foundation, which will raise funds to help support projects like The Eagle Reef Project.

Chris Blankenship, representing Governor Kay Ivey highlighted the State's emphasis on water quality projects. "We need everyone pulling together to ensure that we can improve and sustain our ecosystems and the production of seafood and the natural processes that clean our waters and promote healthy habitat."

Joe Bonner, President of the University of South Alabama (Go Jags!), thanked John, his parents, and John's Scouting friends who were in attendance, and talked about how corporations, academia, and government must work together to ensure the health and well-being of our waters and natural habitat.

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“Our Stokes School of Marine and Environmental Science has a long history of being the flagship institution in coastal sciences. The Dauphin Island Sea Lab, under the leadership of Marine Biologist Dr. Sean Power, studies and teaches ways to restore our marine life populations and keep them healthy and protected.”

He went on to say that South Alabama is fully committed to partnering with the [Department of Marine Resources](#), who were also in attendance, to find solutions to the issues that threaten the health and safety of the waters along our coast. “It’s exciting to help facilitate, train, and teach skills to lead such a program as The Eagle Reef Project.”



It is estimated that 1,000 mini-reefs deployed throughout the area will filter up to 10 billion gallons of water annually, creating habitats that result in up to 500,000 fish and crabs per year in coastal waters. The University of South Alabama will assist in location identification, deployment, stocking, and maintaining the reef project in addition to monitoring the reefs and testing the waters surrounding them.

Partners for Environmental Progress is rallying its membership to raise funds and awareness for cleaning the coastal waters and improving the fish populations for area residents and visitors. Each reef comes pre-assembled, tied between four pilings under a dock or wharf, and floats up and down with the tides. If needed, the reefs can be seeded with oysters to help reestablish the oyster population in various locations.

If interested in participating, go to [TheEagleReef.com](http://TheEagleReef.com).

Thank you John for your inspiring project and commitment to the health and enjoyment of the Scenic 98 Coastal environment. You have done an incredible job!

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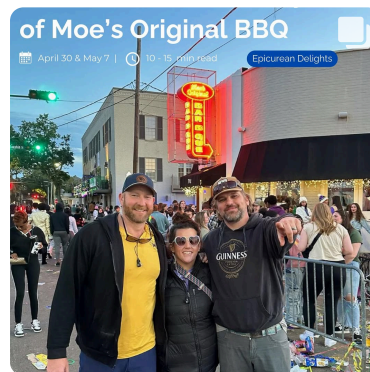
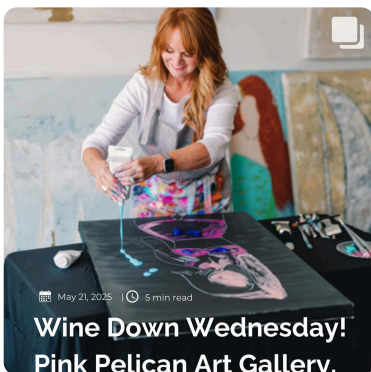
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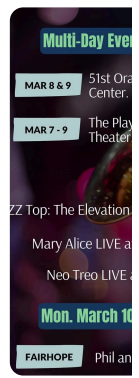
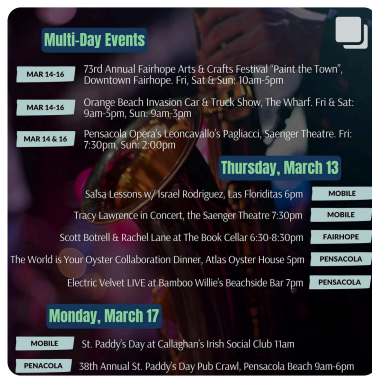
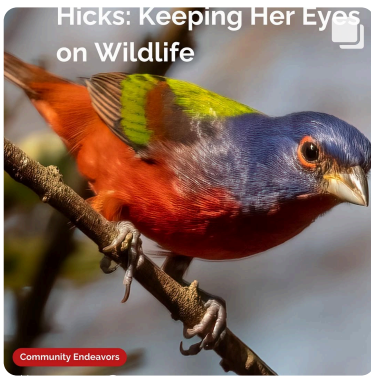
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