

## **“Crabtor” sculpture to be lowered into Gulf off Carrabelle this week, creating unique artificial reef** *“Robby’s Reef” to honor the memory of Robby Redding*

CARRABELLE – A giant sculpture fashioned to look like a cross between a crab and a trackhoe will be lowered into the Gulf of Mexico about 10 miles southeast of Dog Island next week to create Florida’s newest artificial reef – “Robby’s Reef.”

The reef will be a permanent and fitting memorial for Robby Redding, a passionate fisherman who continued fishing even after a tragic 2000 automobile crash left him wheelchair-bound. Robby died in 2008. The reef will be created off the coast of Carrabelle at Latitude 29°39.60N” and Longitude 84°30.00W” southeast of Dog Island.

The sculpture, which Robby’s parents, Leslie and Charley Redding, affectionately call “Crabtor,” was donated by Mike Bettinger, a sculptor and welder and the owner of Bettinger Welding. The materials for the sculpture all came from a scrap pile in his yard, so it’s 100% recycled.

“Robby was a great kid. He loved fishing and heavy equipment, so the sculpture is a very fitting memorial to him,” Bettinger said.

Robby’s Reef will be assembled in the Gulf in two phases by the Organization for Artificial Reefs (OAR.) The first deployment will include the placement of the sculpture itself along with concrete culverts donated by Emory Mayfield, owner of M. Inc. Culverts are favorite shelters for fish. The first deployment will occur sometime this week, when the tides are right and weather permits.

The second deployment will involve the placement of precast fish habitats, including limestone structures and several “grouper boxes” made by renowned Reefmaker, the largest deployer of artificial reefs in the U.S., with more than 18,000 deployments.

The project is unique in that all the costs associated with building the reef will be covered by private donations. Robby’s parents and friends, with support from local bands, hosted a series of fundraisers for the past three years to raise more than \$30,000 for the project. Mr. Redding said the family will continue its fundraising efforts to maintain the reef.

“It makes us so happy to know that Robby’s Reef will be a living, thriving habitat for underwater life and fertile ground for those who love to fish or dive. Robby would have loved this,” Charley Redding said. “We are so grateful to everyone who worked so hard to make this happen.”

Alan Richardson, director of the all-volunteer organization, OAR, which will assemble and maintain Robby’s Reef, said it will be a destination reef for divers and fishermen.

“You won’t find anything like this anywhere. It’s a new design based on the latest research,” Richardson said. “The different structures will create very unique habits. We are very interested to see what fish are attracted to it.”

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission’s Executive Director Nick Wiley said artificial reefs are an important way to provide habitat for reef fish and to preserve Florida’s status as a fishing and diving mecca. Wiley said artificial reefs attract fish quickly and become a thriving habitat in a few months.

“Robby’s Reef is truly a wonderful gift to the State of Florida and to fishermen who come from everywhere to fish here.” Wiley said. “It is wonderful to see Robby’s love of fishing live on in this way.”