

Carysfort Reef: A Catalyst for Community Resilience

Ocean Reef Club® and Coral Restoration Foundation™ have a beautiful history of collaboration around restoration work at the iconic Carysfort Reef. In 2015, Coral Restoration Foundation™ entered a five-year partnership with Ocean Reef Club® to re-populate the site with 30,000 corals, saving the reef from extinction. By the end of 2020, we had returned more than 34,000 corals to Carysfort. The impact of this work has had an extraordinary ripple effect throughout the community. The success of our work together at Carysfort provided the inspiration and a launching pad for Mission: Iconic Reefs, one of the biggest restoration efforts in the world. Coral restoration at this scale is now recognized as critical to the way of life here in the Keys and large-scale restoration work is now being acknowledged as having the capacity to improve livelihoods and diversify the local economy.

In July 2021, Coral Restoration Foundation™ was awarded a grant of just under \$2 million by United Way of Collier and the Keys (UWCK) to support ongoing work at Carysfort Reef. This funding was the first significant investment in sites targeted by the Mission: Iconic Reefs plan. This competitive grant is part of UWCK's "Revitalizing the Florida Keys through Reef Restoration and Beyond" initiative, with support from the United Arab Emirates. UWCK's goal is to revitalize the coral reefs - the lifeblood of the Florida Keys economy - while supporting sustainability through education, outreach, and community impact.

Under this grant, CRF™



Staghorn corals thriving in the clear waters of the iconic Carysfort Reef. Photos by Alexander Neufeld/Coral Restoration Foundation™

will return more than 14,500 threatened elkhorn and staghorn corals to Carysfort Reef – in addition to the 20,000 corals they will bring to the site funded by other sources. The grant will also directly infuse millions of dollars into the Keys economy, provide 120 internships to students over the next five years, engage over 1,000 volunteers in reef restoration, and provide seasonal employment and added revenue to community residents and dive shops. As part of this grant, CRF™ committed to match UWCK's funding: \$389,000 annually for five years. And, once again, Ocean Reef Club® and its Members are stepping up in support, beginning with a grant from the Ocean Reef Conservation Association and **John Davidson** who has committed a significant donation from his family foundation.

Davidson explains "I will never forget the day when I first jumped in the water at Pennekamp Park as a teenager. The colors and the diversity of life were breathtaking. CRF™ is our best hope for bringing our reefs back to their previous glory. Our coral reefs are our most unique and valuable resource, we need to restore and preserve them for future generations." The Davidson Family is also galvanizing the Rod and Gun Club and other



One of Carysfort's surviving natural boulder corals, evidence of the past glory of this famous reef site, and a reason to be hopeful for the future.

Ocean Reef Club® Members to join the mission, "This is a great opportunity to have a real impact with a donation that goes directly to restore Carysfort Reef with matching funds."

Thanks to the ongoing support of the Ocean Reef

Club® community, Carysfort Reef is becoming much more than an iconic reef site – its recovery is now a catalyst for creating sustainable community resilience in the Florida Keys and a model for restoration internationally.