



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**For More Information Contact:**

Rob Ranieri, 772-781-1222

[info@keepmartinbeautiful.org](mailto:info@keepmartinbeautiful.org)

## Volunteers needed to participate in coastal reforestation campaign for The Reclamation Project of the Treasure Coast

Stuart, Fla. (October 10, 2009) Natural resources are vital to the economy and quality of life in Martin County and the Treasure Coast. Martin County residents can play a role in helping to restore our most treasured natural resource—our river—through The Reclamation Project of the Treasure Coast.

The Reclamation Project, conceived by Miami artist Xavier Cortada, is the first ecoart project to be exhibited on the Treasure Coast. It involves the collection, exhibit and planting of mangrove seedlings in the Indian River Lagoon, not far from the oyster restoration project currently underway in the St. Lucie Estuary. The presence of mangroves in the water is beneficial in many ways, from serving as a filter for upland runoff to helping stabilize shorelines. Mangrove forests also provide important breeding, nursery and feeding areas for a variety of marine life, including endangered and threatened species.

While The Reclamation Project is a separate effort from Martin County's Oyster Restoration Project, the two initiatives share common goals. "Both projects are working to improve the health of our estuarine systems by restoring historic filtering and breeding habitat," Martin County Coastal Engineer Kathy Fitzpatrick said. "We are grateful to all of the community partners who are helping to move these initiatives forward."

Mangrove restoration efforts begin on Saturday, October 10, 2009 at 8:30 a.m. with the project's first crop of red mangrove seedlings being planted at two locations - the Florida Oceanographic Coastal Center and Joe's River Park – both on Hutchinson Island. In addition to the plantings, volunteers will be collecting new mangrove seeds from the river's edge at the Jensen Beach

Causeway and the Florida Oceanographic Coastal Center, to be nurtured and planted next fall as part of the annual coastal reforestation campaign of The Reclamation Project – Treasure Coast.

Once the seeds are collected, they will be in need of “foster care.” Project organizers are hopeful that school groups, businesses, civic organizations will ‘sponsor’ for the mangrove seeds for a small fee. Caretakers are asked to nurture the seeds by keeping them in water until early next year when they will be prepared for the 2010 exhibits. “The funds generated will sustain the efforts of the project so that mangrove recovery on public lands can be an annual occurrence in Martin County,” said Meg Whitmer, local Project Coordinator for The Reclamation Project – Treasure Coast.

Students and adults alike will work together to reforest the mangroves in our waters, a critical natural resource within our marine ecosystems. Through the project, groups will get to witness the entire life cycle of mangroves, from seed to tree, and learn the important functions they serve.

Keep Martin Beautiful is working in partnership with Martin County and The Reclamation Project to help coordinate this and other natural plantings countywide. “Keep Martin Beautiful is proud to support this effort which, like our other programs, provides sustainable solutions for volunteers to make a direct impact in their communities through their own individual actions,” Keep Martin Beautiful President Rhonda Irons said. For more information about the Mangrove Reclamation Project, to volunteer or to adopt a mangrove seedling, contact Keep Martin Beautiful at 781-1222 or email at [info@keepmartinbeautiful.org](mailto:info@keepmartinbeautiful.org).

### **The Importance of Mangroves in our Ecosystem**

Mangroves are a type of tree that grows well in or near salty water along sheltered coastlines. Coastlines, however, are also prime locations for homes, hotels and condominiums. It is estimated that more than 23,500 acres of mangroves have been lost through dredging and filling in Florida, primarily to develop waterfront property. Because of previous losses and alterations of mangroves, combined with limited public ownership, Florida's state and local governments have found it necessary to adopt regulations concerning the alteration of this fast-dwindling natural resource. In addition, volunteer groups throughout Florida have stepped up in recent years to gather, nurture, plant, and reforest mangroves with the goal of restoring this vital marine habitat resource to our waters once again.

Benefits of mangroves to our ecosystem:

- Mangroves provide breeding, nursery and feeding areas for a variety of life, including endangered and threatened species.

- Mangroves filter upland run off.
- Mangroves buffer wave action during intense tropical storms (including hurricanes).
- Mangroves hold soil during periods of heavy precipitation - stabilizing shoreline sediments and helping to slow erosion.
- Mangroves are part of the food chain. Leaf litter that falls from mangroves is then broken down by microorganisms. This begins the first link in the food chain for a large segment of the tropical aquatic community, including most of our important commercial and sport fish species.

### **About the Oyster Reef Restoration Project**

The Oyster Reef Restoration Project involves the placement of approximately 30 million pounds of cultch (fossilized shells, coral and other similar materials produced by living organisms) within the St. Lucie Estuary and the Northwest Fork of the Loxahatchee River to provide critically needed habitat so that oysters can repopulate the estuaries.

Oyster habitat is crucial to the health of our estuaries, effectively filtering nutrients, fine sediments and toxins from the water. Just one adult oyster can filter between 20 and 50 gallons of water per day. The newly constructed reef habitat, when fully populated with oysters, could filter the total volume of the St Lucie Estuary in about a month.

Oyster reefs also provide essential habitat structure for many other forms of marine life including shrimp, clams, crabs, snails and a variety of fish including gag grouper, gray snapper, redfish, sheepshead.

The project, funded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, takes a significant step toward the fulfillment of one of the goals of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) and will be implemented by Martin County's Engineering Department.

In addition to many environmental and recreational benefits, the Oyster Reef Restoration Project will also provide economic returns by safeguarding existing jobs and creating new ones - ranging from marine construction to scientific research - within the community over the expected twenty-four month project period. Environmental improvements resulting from the implementation of this project will provide additional recreational opportunities far into the future. This project is an investment in the long-term economic health of the area's recreationally-based economy.

For more information about the Oyster Reef Restoration Project go to [www.oysterrestoration.com](http://www.oysterrestoration.com)

## **About Keep Martin Beautiful**

Keep Martin Beautiful is a 501(c) (3) non profit community organization founded in 1994. Its mission is to preserve and enhance the quality of life in Martin County through litter prevention, promotion of recycling, improvement of solid waste management practices, and beautification and community revitalization activities. KMB signature events and programs include the annual Environmental Stewardship Awards Ceremony, International Coastal Cleanup, the Great American Cleanup, the Adopt-A-Road program, the Adopt-A Street program and other educational and outreach activities.

KMB is an affiliate of Keep America Beautiful, and a volunteer driven organization that relies on memberships, sponsorships, grants, and other revenue to fund its important efforts. For more information call 781-1222 or email [info@keepmartinbeautiful.org](mailto:info@keepmartinbeautiful.org) or visit [www.keepmartinbeautiful.org](http://www.keepmartinbeautiful.org).

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