

Jamaican artist works to save fish, coral reefs

by Susan Cocking
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When marine artist Guy Harvey tried in the 1980s to warn fish managers in his native Jamaica that fish populations and coral reefs were in decline, he was ignored. Harvey, who has a doctorate in marine biology, was extremely frustrated.

"With all these suggestions, nothing gets done about it, and you watch the resource get annihilated," he said. "The coral reefs and fish in Jamaica are now drastically depleted."

Harvey, a part-time Fort Lauderdale resident, wants to make sure that doesn't happen throughout the rest of the Caribbean and in Florida. On Monday, he formally announced the creation of the Guy Harvey Research Institute at Nova Southeastern University's Oceanographic Center in Dania Beach.

The institute, partly funded by proceeds from the sales of Harvey's paintings, T-shirts and calendars - along with private donations - will concentrate on research aimed at bolstering the world's declining fish populations. Such studies already are under way at NSU, according to Richard Spieler, an oceanography professor who serves as executive director of the institute.

Spieler's graduate students are conducting research on fish populations in Broward County waters; on the effects of artificial reefs on fish habitat and behavior; and on identifying individual shark species by extracting DNA from small fin clip samples.

"We are not here for the commercial fisherman or the recreational fisherman," Spieler said. "If we have an constituency at all, it's the fishes. Our goal is in-depth unbiased research that resource managers need to make informed decisions."

Harvey, who flies back and forth between homes in Fort Lauderdale and Grand Cayman, hopes to accompany NSU students on some of their research expeditions.

He recently dived with researchers studying Caribbean reef sharks at Walkers Cay in the Bahamas, and produced a documentary video on the experience. The video is being shown at the International Game Fish Association Hall of Fame and Museum in Dania Beach.

"To work with the people at GHRI, it gives me the opportunity to get close to the animals I paint," Harvey said. "The only way to get research work done is to get into the field with the animals yourself. It blends the art and science. It's good for everybody."

For more information about the Guy Harvey Research Institute, or to make donations for FISH CONSERVATION RESEARCH:

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