



[\\$50-Million Coral Reef Research Center Opens](#)

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From left to right: NSU President George L. Hanbury II joins undergraduate student Erica Oliva and NSU Oceanographic Center doctoral student Liz Larson at the university's offshore coral reef nursery, off the coast of Ft. Lauderdale, Fla. The nursery is where NSU students and scientists transplant healthy corals grown in NSU laboratories to repopulate and replace damaged corals.

This Saturday is the one-month anniversary of Nova Southeastern University's (NSU) new 86,000 square-foot [Center of Excellence for Coral Reef Ecosystems Research](#). The \$50-million facility, located at [NSU's Oceanographic Center](#) at [John U. Lloyd Beach State Park](#) in Hollywood, Florida, celebrated its grand opening at the end of September.

The massive and multifaceted project was funded in large part by President Obama's stimulus package from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. Specifically, the money came from a \$15 million grant from the [US Department of Commerce](#), with the NSU funding the remainder of the project's cost.

The grant was one of the largest of 12 given for winning a nationwide competition held by the Department of Commerce's National Institute of Standards and Technology. Other grantees included the Woods Hole Oceanographic Center, Columbia University, Purdue, Georgia Tech Research Corporation, Georgetown University, and University of Maryland.



NSU's Center of Excellence for Coral Reef Ecosystems Research with the marine in the foreground

According to Richard E. Dodge, Ph.D., dean of NSU's Oceanographic Center and executive director of their National Coral Reef Institute, the university felt it was a worthwhile investment. "Coral reefs are ecosystems of incredible environmental as well as economic value," Dodge explained and added, "The UN estimates that globally coral reefs generate over \$172 billion per year from the services they provide including tourism, recreation, and fisheries. In South Florida alone, reef ecosystems have been shown to generate over \$6 billion in annual economic contributions and more than 71,000 jobs."

With coral reefs facing numerous threats such as overfishing, rising sea temperatures, ocean acidification due to CO₂ from pollution, and coastal development, scientists say research and immediate action is needed to prevent further decline of our reefs. According to Dodge, we have

already severely degraded and/or permanently destroyed 25-30 % of the world's reefs. "Some [models] even predict reefs could be wiped out within a human generation unless action is taken," he explains.

NSU President, George L. Hanbury II, Ph.D agrees. "The research center is critical for the environmental sustainability of coral reefs, which are the life blood of our region and oceans, and their ecosystems," says Hanbury. Not only is the center crucial for protecting reefs, it is also, according to Hanbury, important to the local economy. "This center is a boon to NSU's multidisciplinary research mission as well as being a catalyst for the creation of hundreds of new jobs in the region, both academic and non," he explains. To date the center has created 22 academic jobs, 300 construction jobs, employed 50 graduate students, and preserved 22 already-existing academic jobs.



From Left to Right: Back row - Richard E. Dodge, Former U.S. Vice President Al Gore, and NSU President George L. Hanbury II. Front row - NSU Oceanographic Center graduate students demonstrate how NSU's onshore coral reef nurseries work.

The center is aptly located in southern Florida, a state that is home to 84% of the nation's reefs, where businesses in the area such as dive shops, restaurants, hotels, gift shops, boat tours, cruises all depend on the reefs for their livelihoods. "...[the] coral reef research center will help sustain and preserve the reefs, which will then help many small business owners like me to continue to

survive,” Frank Gernert, owner of the local Fort Lauderdale waterfront restaurant, Coconuts, stated in a press release.

This could explain why the grand opening ceremony drew such high profile figures as Congresswoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz, Dr. Paul Sandifer, Senior Science Advisor to the [NOAA](#) Administrator, and former Vice President, [Al Gore](#). In addition, numerous members of federal, state, county, and local government attended, as did NSU’s Board of Trustees and many private citizens. “The community showed a great deal of interest and support,” Dodge explained of the level of participation on opening day.



From Left to Right: Richard E. Dodge, Ph.D.; dean of Nova Southeastern University's Oceanographic Center and executive director of NSU's National Coral Reef Institute; NSU President George L. Hanbury II, Ph.D.; U.S. Congresswoman and Democratic National Committee Chair Debbie Wasserman Schultz; Former U.S. Vice President Al Gore; and Fred Lippman, R.Ph., Ed.D., Chancellor of NSU's Health Professions Division at the grand opening.

Using the center’s new cutting-edge laboratory facilities and equipment, marine science library, and 85-seat auditorium, Hanbury and Dodge hope to achieve several concrete goals including:

- Assess the current overall health of coral reefs and their recoverability
- Further study the impacts of climate change on reefs
- Examine the effects of run-off pollution on reefs
- Investigate the flow of water in and around reefs
- Study coral growth rings to reconstruct the history of reefs
- Map the extent of coral reefs around the world & how they are changing
- Cultivate species of coral in nurseries for reintroduction to the ocean

Time will tell if these goals are fully achievable, but one thing is certain: the center is off to a strong start and is armed with a dedicated staff who are passionate about saving our reefs across the globe.

*All photos courtesy NSU