



STACIE AND ROB BUDA HOLD A PHOTO OF THEIR LATE SON BRYCE AS A CRANE LOWERS HIS MEMORIAL REEF INTO PLACE. [FRANK STEPHENSON | THE TIMES]

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Marine memories for life

By Frank Stephenson • July 27, 2026



On Saturday, July 25, the Tallahassee-based Organization for Artificial Reefs coordinated the installation of four new reefs in two different sites off Dog Island.

A total of 54 artificial reef modules were deployed with precision by Walter Marine, a company based in Orange Beach, Alabama. The project, designed and engineered by OAR volunteers, was underwritten by a grant from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

More than 20 boatloads of enthusiasts watched the projects take shape amid sunny skies and a calm sea. The crowd included dozens of family members who watched the placement of special reefs dedicated to the memory of lost loved ones.



Roughly 10 miles off the beach in 42 feet of water, OAR established a memorial reef for Bryce Buda, a gifted marine wildlife enthusiast and a Florida State University student who died in 2020, and also one in the memory of Spencer Walker, a Tallahassee-born attorney who died in 2025.

Closer to shore, the team built the Drew Thompson Memorial Reef in 35 feet of water. Thompson, who died in 2025, was a lifelong fisherman and outdoorsman who especially enjoyed Dog Island, St. Theresa and St. Marks. Adjacent this reef was built a memorial named “Cat’s Cradle,” to commemorate Catherine Volding Jones, the late wife of Dr. John Jones.

Now in its 41st year of operation, OAR has built dozens of permanent reefs off Wakulla and Franklin County beaches. The nonprofit group specializes in building memorial reefs that serve as lasting tributes to family members whose lives were inextricably connected to the sea and marine conservation. For more about OAR, visit oarreefs.org.

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