

REEF'S NEW OCEAN EXPLORATION CENTER IN KEY LARGO TO OPEN DURING WORLD OCEANS DAY

By **Contributed** - February 25, 2025



A rendering showing the Founders Gallery inside the REEF Center. CONTRIBUTED

Reef Environmental Education Foundation's (REEF) new Ocean Exploration Center for Marine Conservation will open later this year. Located at the REEF campus in Key Largo, the public is invited to join a grand opening celebration on June 7-8, coinciding with World Ocean Day.

This 4,000-square-foot, two-story facility will serve as a hub for marine conservation, education and citizen science. Designed to inspire ocean stewardship for all ages, the center will feature interactive exhibits and a science discovery classroom. There will also be galleries dedicated to ocean exploration, scientific innovation and the intersection of history, humanities and the arts.

"The Ocean Exploration Center is more than just a building — it's a launchpad for future ocean stewards, a collaborative space for scientific research, and a place where visitors can explore how they can make a difference for the marine environment," said Martha Klitzkie, co-executive director of REEF.



The center will highlight conservation success stories and equip people with the tools to help protect our ocean. It will complement the current REEF facilities, including an historic conch-style building — the oldest building in the Upper Keys still in its original location — which now houses REEF's campus administration. In addition, the Reefscape Room features a floor-to-ceiling mural showcasing marine ecosystems of the Florida Keys, along with the Native Plants Trail, an outdoor oasis with a variety of native flora, educational signs and seating areas.

The grand opening event will include family-friendly activities, interactive exhibits, educational demos, food and drinks. More information is at www.reef.org/oecgrandopening.



The new REEF Ocean Exploration Center in Key Largo will open June 7-8 to coincide with World Oceans Day. CONTRIBUTED

Thanks to donors, REEF has raised 93% of the \$6 million needed to bring the Ocean Exploration Center to life. Now, a \$100,000 challenge grant from REEF members Byron and Sheila Bishop will match new donations and pledges made before June 30.

Donor recognition opportunities include personalized plaques, gallery naming and more. While REEF welcomes support at any time, to ensure that recognition is in place for the grand opening, gifts or pledges should be confirmed by Friday, Feb. 28.

A purple banner for the 40th Annual Underwater Music Festival. On the left is a circular logo featuring a mermaid playing a harp, with the text 'THE UNDERWATER MUSIC FESTIVAL' and 'A FLORIDA COAST GUARD NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY AT LOOE KEY'. To the right of the logo, text reads: 'The Lower Keys Chamber of Commerce is very proud to present the 40th Annual UNDERWATER MUSIC FESTIVAL'. Below this, it says 'PUT ON YOUR FAVORITE COSTUME AND YOUR GEAR TO DIVE OR SNORKEL ON.' On the right side of the banner, event details are listed: 'FRIDAY JULY 12th from 6-8pm at Mote Marine on Summerland Key' and 'SATURDAY JULY 13th from 10am-2pm at Looe Key National Marine Sanctuary'. A contact number '305.872.2411' is provided. Logos for 'Florida Keys & Key West' and 'Lower Keys' are at the bottom right.

The Lower Keys Chamber of Commerce is very proud to present the 40th Annual

UNDERWATER MUSIC FESTIVAL

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JULY 12th from 6-8pm
at Mote Marine on Summerland Key

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For questions please call 305.872.2411

Florida Keys & Key West
Lower Keys

More donation information is at www.reef.org/oec-support or via email to giving@REEF.org.



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A banner with a purple and orange gradient background. On the left, the text 'HERE ARE THE WINNERS' is written in large, bold, yellow letters. On the right, there is a graphic of a lighthouse on a small island, with the text '2024 BEST OF UPPER KEYS' in bold, yellow letters. Above the lighthouse graphic, it says 'Presented by WEEKLY' with a palm tree icon. Below the lighthouse graphic, there is a small 'WEEKLY' logo.

HERE ARE THE WINNERS

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2024 BEST OF UPPER KEYS

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