

JUNE 20, 2025

SOUTH DADE NEWS LEADER 3B

Lifestyle

Enjoy a Reef and Stay Dry



A drone image of the large crowd attending the grand opening of the Ocean Exploration Center on the REEF Campus in Key Largo. REEF Co-Executive Directors Martha Klitzke and Christy Pattengill-Semmens cut the ribbon. Photo courtesy of REEF.

By Charlie Hudson

Individuals who dive and snorkel the local reefs enjoy the beautiful underwater world filled with marine creatures of all sizes.

For others, their love of—or curiosity about—the reefs does not include the ability to go into the water. Even for divers, more time is often spent on land than in the sea.

Although visiting a large aquarium can be an option, the Reef Environmental Education Foundation (REEF) recently held the grand opening of their Ocean Exploration Center: “a dynamic, interactive space where ocean enthusiasts of all ages can explore the wonders of the underwater world—no wetsuit required!”

The official grand opening weekend took place June 7–8, 2025. A special preview was held on Thursday, June 5, as staff rushed to put the finishing touches into place.

Christy Pattengill-

Semmens, PhD, Co-Executive Director of Science & Engagement, welcomed attendees, and her early comment summed up the common reaction: “It kind of took my breath away when I walked in this morning.”

More than thirty years ago, newly graduated from the University of Southern California with a Bachelor of Science in Marine Sciences, Pattengill-Semmens came to Key Largo as an intern with the nonprofit Nature Conservancy. She officially joined the REEF staff in 1998 and has since played a major role in the ongoing campus expansion, culminating in the new building.

The project has been in the works for some time, with the initial seed money provided by the Monroe County Tourism Development Council.

Although that provided a good start, much more work was needed to secure additional funding and

ensure the incredible number of details required to bring the center to life were achieved.

As the website describes, “The Ocean Exploration Center is a launchpad for inspiring future ocean stewards, pioneering research, fostering collaboration, and transforming marine conservation. Visitors—both in person and on-line—are empowered as citizen scientists, and become equipped with the knowledge, tools, and resources to act as guardians of our blue planet.”

A prominent feature on the ground floor includes three sections of patch reef—scientifically accurate and meticulously crafted by fabrication experts; a fish identification card explains the 51 different species in the exhibit and serves as a guide for the “survey.”

As a major REEF program, their Volunteer Fish Survey Project for

divers and snorkelers, along with this exhibit replicates that experience. In total, more than 100 species are represented through additional fabrications suspended from the ceiling or featured in oversized photographs on the walls.

Also on the main floor is the Exploration Room, where classes and experiments can take place. REEF offers a variety of in-person and virtual educational opportunities.

Information about accessing these resources is available at www.REEF.org/supporting-educators.

Upstairs, visitors will find additional exhibits, interactive activities, and a quiet area to sit and relax.

Speaking of relaxing, the adjoining small park featuring the Native Plants & Heritage Trail has been enhanced, with overhead canvas shades now offering relief from the sun. The trail offers a self-guided experience, allowing guests to explore at their own pace while learning about native plants, local wildlife, and the conservation efforts that define our unique ecosystem.

If time allows, guests are encouraged to stroll over to the Reefscape Room, which opened in 2017. This “dry land” experience features a floor-to-ceiling mural that highlights the variety of marine ecosystems found in the Florida Keys—from seagrass and mangrove habitats to coral and artificial reefs. The space is also used for classes, workshops, lectures, and other gatherings. Staff and volunteers remain dedicated to REEF’s founding principles.

“REEF conserves marine environments worldwide. Our mission is to protect biodiversity and ocean life by actively engaging and inspiring the public through citizen science, education, and partnerships with the scientific community.”

Obituary

Dorothy “Mimi”

Dorothy “Mimi” Dickson, age 94 passed away peacefully on June 16th 2025 (just one week shy of her 95th birthday).

Mimi was born in Boston, Mass and graduated from Mass Art with a Bachelor’s Degree and a Master’s Degree from Boston University in Education.

Mimi spent her earlier years between Boston and New York until her family finally journeyed to Homestead, Florida in 1996.

Her passion for Art lead her to spend the majority of her working years teaching and mentoring art to young children until her retirement. Mimi was very active in the Homestead community and was proud to show her paintings at various events throughout the community. Her artwork has been exhibited in numerous art shows throughout Homestead and Miami. Some people have called Mimi “feisty” because you could not keep her down. She traveled and continued to paint until just recently.

Mimi is survived by 2 sons—David and Edward Dickson and their wives, Michele and Dee, 3 grandchildren Valerie, Scott & Alexandra, two step grandchildren, Lisa and Laura, 5 great grandchildren, Angelina, Ava, Sydney, SJ and Nora and 1 great, great grandchild, Noah. Her husband Sidney, eldest son Steven and granddaughter Melissa (posthumously) will be there to greet her in Heaven.



The Ocean Exploration Center is yet another way REEF reaches out to the public with free opportunities to experience the amazing world beneath the waves.

The campus is open every day except Thursdays and major holidays.

Monday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday hours are from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

On Tuesdays, the center is open from 12:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. REEF is located at MM 98.3 in the median along the iconic Overseas Highway.

The address is 98300 Overseas Hwy, Key Largo, FL 33037.

For more information, call (305) 852-0030, email reef@reef.org, or visit www.REEF.org. REEF can also be found on Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter).

To submit an obituary or death notice,

email wording and

jpg photo to

Info@

NewsLeaderMail.com,

or

call 305-245-2311.

Print deadline is

Wednesday at noon.

Zoo Miami Galapagos Tortoise Celebrates Being a Father For The First Time at Age 134!



“Goliath” and his offspring.

By Ron Magill

This past Father’s Day, June 15th, Zoo Miami’s oldest animal celebrated his 134th

Galapagos tortoise has hatched, making this an historic event on multiple levels!

Goliath’s official

indicating that she is between 85-100 years old.

An application has been made to the

from the egg and the parents have no further connection to them. The hatchling appears to be healthy and has been

Homestead High Students Learn the Basics of the Electrical Profession



By David Volz

A group of Homestead Senior High School students is gaining valuable real-world experience by participating in a summer program run by Louis Cooper, who is heading Bright Idea.

The students are learning the basics of electricity—from the

about the 1910s, it became common in big cities, but rural areas did not have electricity until the 1930s,” said Cooper.

The Homestead students participate in the training program on Mondays and Fridays, and they are learning from professional electricians. Those who show a passion and

ontology:

His name is "Goliath," and he is a Galapagos tortoise that weighs 517 pounds!

Up until the prior week, he had not fathered any offspring. That changed when after 128 days of incubation, one egg out of a clutch of 8 that was laid January 27th, successfully hatched on June 4th!

Not only is this the first offspring for Goliath, but it is also the first time in the history of Zoo Miami that a

record has been hatching out on the island of Santa Cruz in the Galapagos on June 15th, 1885. He arrived at the Bronx Zoo on July 23rd, 1929, and finally came to Zoo Miami on July 30th, 1981. During his time at Zoo Miami, he had bred with several different females but had never successfully sired an offspring.

The mother is "Sweet Pea," and she arrived at the Crandon Park Zoo on Key Biscayne, Florida as an adult in 1960,

Guinness Book of World Records to officially recognize Goliath as "The Oldest First-Time Father in History!" Considering the age of Sweet Pea, their combined age is over 200 and they may also qualify as "The Oldest First-Time Parents in History!"

Both Goliath and Sweet Pea are doing well on their public habitat and are not aware of their newly hatched offspring. In the wild, hatchlings are on their own from the moment they emerge

removed from the incubator and placed in a separate enclosure where it is active and full of energy!

Father's Day was extra special at Zoo Miami as we not only celebrated Goliath's birthday, but we also celebrated how the stars have finally aligned to make him a father for the first time in his amazing 135-year life! He is an inspiration to never give up hope!

history of how it was discovered, eventually applied to light up cities and power technology, and how to become an electrical professional.

"The students are learning the foundation of AC and DC and the things you can do in the electrical field," said Cooper who also works for the City of Homestead and is superintendent over the electrical substations.

"Electricity was a new technology in the late 1800s and early 1900s. In

ability for the profession may pursue an apprenticeship with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers.

"If they can get an apprenticeship, they can actually work on a job site, and we have students who have qualified for apprenticeships," said Cooper.

Electricians are in high demand, and the students at Homestead High are learning important skills from the best in the industry.