

Old tug boat to become reef honoring diver

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Video: <https://www.tcpalm.com/videos/news/2018/05/12/kerry-dillon-reef-tug-boat-soon-become-fish-habitat/34839681/>



(Photo: CONTRIBUTED PHOTO BY ANDY STEINBERGS)

By summer's end, offshore fish like grouper, snapper, hogfish and lobsters will have another place they can call home.

Thursday, officials with St. Lucie County-based Sea-Life Habitat Improvement Project, Inc. (SHIP), took possession of a large steel tug boat. After cleaning the vessel, which was in service as a towing tug boat for more than 50 years, SHIP will convert the Tug Penobscot into the Kerry Dillon Tugboat Reef offshore of St. Lucie and Martin counties.

The process will take at minimum a month, said April Price, executive director of SHIP, a non-profit reef building organization created in 2010. The sinking of the tug boat as an artificial reef will be SHIP's first official reef creation.

"We're very grateful to have had this tug boat donated to us by Sophlex Enterprises of Port Canaveral," Price said. "And we're so happy to be able to honor our friend Kerry Dillon who did so much for the artificial reef building community on the Treasure Coast and in Florida."

Dillon, 58, died unexpectedly in June 2017 at his home in Stuart. A 1986 graduate of Florida Institute of Technology, he owned Sea Rover Services and performed design, construction and monitoring of artificial reefs in Florida and the Caribbean Sea. His work assisted numerous agencies as well including National Oceanographic Atmospheric Administration, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Florida Institute of Technology's Ocean Engineering Department and more.

"This reef project honors our founding board member who was responsible for much of the region's annual reef monitoring and was a valuable asset to our team, but more importantly he was a friend," said SHIP president Andy Brady of Fort Pierce. "We are excited to bring this project to the finish line on behalf of Kerry and his family Ximena, Lucas and Isabella."

More: [Ed Killer: Reef builder Kerry Dillon, 58, gone too soon](#)

The Tug Penobscot is 100 feet long, 27 feet wide and once it reaches the sea floor, will provide some 60 estimated feet of relief off the bottom. Its steel superstructure with bridge and pilot house should provide ample habitat for marine organisms and will last underwater for decades.

Windows, hatches, portholes, holding tanks, wiring and anything containing oil or diesel fuel will be removed or cleaned according to permit requirements by the U.S. Coast Guard and other government agencies. Only after all final inspections are approved can the tug boat be towed to sea where it will be sent to its final resting place.

"We have partnered with CRB Geological & Environmental Services, Inc., and Artificial Reefs International, Inc., who are known for building the U.S.S. Vandenberg Reef in Key West, U.S.C.G.C. Mohawk off Lee County and the soon to be Clamagore Reef off the coast of Palm Beach, among others," Brady said. "They will oversee the cleaning and deployment of this vessel. We look forward to documenting the new life that we see on this reef for decades to come."

Before being towed from Port Canaveral to the Port of Fort Pierce Thursday by McCulley Marine Services in Fort Pierce, the Tug Penobscot had an auspicious recent past. According to [Tugboatinformation.com](#), it was built in 1959 in Madisonville, La. as the Lainoloc for the Bronx Towing Line of New York. In 1977, it was sold to Weeks Marine in Cranford, N.J. and its name was changed to William J. McPhillips. In 1994, the tug was acquired by Hartley Marine Services Incorporated of East Boothbay, Maine and renamed Penobscot. By 2014, the tug was acquired by "foreign interests."

The website listed the tug's disposition as unknown in 2014, but maritime interests at Port Canaveral knew the tug broke free during Hurricane Matthew in 2016 and caused some damage to piers and vessels in the port as it was blown by the winds. Port officials attempted to file liens of more than \$140,000 on the owner of the vessel, Victor

Jattan, but were unable to reach him. In June 2017, the Port filed a lawsuit and acquired the tug boat. It's ownership was acquired at auction by Sophlex Enterprises which donated it to SHIP.

The Kerry Dillon Tugboat Reef is scheduled to be sunken at a site in about 110 feet of water 12 miles southeast of Fort Pierce Inlet and 13 miles northeast of St. Lucie Inlet. I knew Dillon having covered artificial reef projects on the Treasure Coast for the past 24 years. His inboard 23-foot Irish Rover was a mainstay at each and every sinking I witnessed. I think I can count five different tug boats I observed sink and Dillon was there every time to verify its landing position and retrieve GoPro cameras.

I'm happy this project will bear his name. He was a modest and unassuming man, but I know he would have wanted to be remembered with a reef. There will be other projects coming soon this year and next to offshore waters which will also bear some of the work he invested before he passed too young. It will be weird not to see him out there the day of those sinkings. He will be missed, but never forgotten.

And his legacy — reef construction — will last for generations to come.

Sea-Life Habitat Improvement Project, Inc.

Donations are being accepted by the 501(c)3 charity to fund artificial reef projects on the Treasure Coast. To give or learn more go to <http://www.sinkourship.org>, call 772-285-1646 or find it on [Facebook](#).

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Video from Kerry Dillon, Sea Rover Services, Inc.

www.mcacreefs.org

While on a dive Kerry came onto a cave with an octopus eye showing. He left his video camera there hoping to see what the octopus was up to while going off with another camera....when he came back the octopus was GONE! Kerry thought the octopus probably just went further into the cave and that he would see nothing when he watched the video. WOW, what a surprise! IT'S HUGE!!! The original video was an hour long and it was tough getting it down to just a few minutes.