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**United Way Awards \$2.1 Million to Support Local Reef Restoration**

**Florida Keys** — United Way of Collier and the Keys (UWCK) is excited to announce the awarding of \$2.1 million to support coral restoration efforts by two local organizations, Coral Restoration Foundation and Reef Renewal USA. These competitive grants are part of UWCK’s *Revitalizing the Florida Keys through Reef Restoration and Beyond* initiative, with support from the United Arab Emirates.

In February of 2020, UWCK announced a \$3.5 million gift from the UAE for innovative reef restoration and education projects. This funding was the first significant investment in restoration work focusing on two of the seven reefs identified through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA) *Mission: Iconic Reefs*, one of the largest reef restoration efforts in the world.

Coral Restoration Foundation has been awarded \$1,945,926 to expand their work at Carysfort Reef off northern Key Largo, and Reef Renewal USA will receive \$176,356 to implement revolutionary coral outplanting techniques at Sombrero Reef near Marathon, over the next five years.

Both Coral Restoration Foundation and Reef Renewal USA will secure a one-to-one match of the awarded funds, culminating in over \$4.2 million for their restoration efforts. This funding could then be used to match available government funds, resulting in more than \$8.4 million for coral restoration in the Florida Keys.

Grant efforts will prioritize restoration progress towards *Mission: Iconic Reefs*, financial impacts to Monroe County families living paycheck to paycheck, volunteerism, and engagement with students studying marine science.

UWCK’s goal is to revitalize the coral reefs - a lifeblood of the Florida Keys economy - while supporting sustainability through education. Restoring the local reefs will improve coastal protection and provide economic stability for residents, furthering UWCK’s efforts to create thriving communities by improving the financial stability of Keys families.

Since the 1970s, coral reefs in the Florida Keys have suffered dramatic declines with nearly 90 percent of live corals lost. Bold and decisive action is required to change the trajectory of coral reefs in Florida, and to protect the economy that depends on them. Through *Mission: Iconic Reefs*, NOAA, UWCK and partners are undertaking a first-of-its-kind approach to restore corals at seven ecologically and culturally significant reef sites in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.

“For a community that is highly dependent on its natural resources, this is a pivotal moment, with United Way and partners beginning this work for the benefit of generations to come,” says UWCK President and CEO Steve Sanderson.

“We are deeply grateful to the United Arab Emirates and the United Way of Collier and the Keys for their commitment to the Florida Keys community,” says Ken Nedimyer, Technical Director for Reef Renewal USA. “We are especially excited about the opportunity to contribute to developing innovative strategies to accelerate the recovery of our precious reefs.”

According to Scott Winters, Coral Restoration Foundation CEO, “*Mission: Iconic Reefs* and this significant investment in the plan by UWCK and the UAE are testaments to all our achievements of last few years – especially at Carysfort Reef. But this work is about much more than just reef restoration. It’s about building socio-economic resiliency in our communities that rely on coral reefs. The economy of the Keys relies on a healthy coral reef to support tourism and the commercial fishery, but the process of restoring these reefs will also generate employment. Work on coral restoration at this scale is a catalyst for building community resilience by improving livelihoods and diversifying the local economy.”

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## **About United Way of Collier and the Keys**

[United Way of Collier and the Keys](#) creates thriving communities by improving the financial stability of families living paycheck to paycheck and by strengthening health and education. Our vision is to foster the well-being of Collier and Monroe County residents, helping them to succeed, enhancing the overall quality of life across both counties.

## **About Reef Renewal USA**

[Reef Renewal USA, Inc. \(RRUSA\)](#) is dedicated to developing innovative coral restoration techniques to restore reefs along the Florida Keys Reef track. The strategies are bold and innovative, driven primarily by volunteers with a goal of creating and training an army of volunteers who take ownership of their local reefs and commit their time, talent and resources to helping mother nature recover.

Reef Renewal USA will be working at [Sombrero Reef](#), off the coast of Marathon, Florida. Sombrero Key Sanctuary Preservation Area (SPA) has a spur-and-groove reef formation with stands of elkhorn coral. It is named for the historic Sombrero Key Light in the northern corner.

## **About Coral Restoration Foundation**

[Coral Restoration Foundation \(CRF\)](#) is the world's largest nonprofit dedicated to coral reef restoration. Combining science, restoration, and education, we developed the materials, methods and experience to restore reefs at previously unrealized scales by involving and supporting the local communities.

Coral Restoration Foundation will be working at [Carysfort Reef](#), off the coast of Key Largo, Florida. The Carysfort/South Carysfort Sanctuary Preservation Area (SPA) is the largest SPA in Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. The 1.5 square nautical mile area is one of the best developed reef systems in the Keys.

## **About United Arab Emirates**

The [United Arab Emirates](#) is a source of stability, tolerance, innovation and growth in the Arabian Gulf and around the world. The United States and the UAE are close friends and strong allies, working together to promote regional security, create economic prosperity, and address pressing global challenges. The UAE is the largest export market for US goods in the Middle East, and more US naval vessels visit UAE ports than any other ports outside the United States. Cultural, educational, commercial, and medical partnerships between the UAE and US are spurring innovation, inspiring creativity, and increasing understanding in both countries.

## **About Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary**

The [Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary](#) is one of 16 marine protected areas that make up the National Marine Sanctuary System. Administered by NOAA, a federal agency, and jointly managed with the State of Florida, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary protects 3,800 square miles of waters surrounding the Florida Keys, from south of Miami westward to encompass the Dry Tortugas, excluding Dry Tortugas National Park. The shoreward boundary of the sanctuary is the mean high water mark, which means once you set foot in Keys waters, you have entered the sanctuary.

All reef restoration work is conducted under permit from the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.