



### Marriott Hosts Presentation by Reef Ball Foundation-“What Can We Do To Help?”

There was quite a show-out at the Marriott Beach Resort last Friday afternoon as they hosted an eco-friendly presentation by the Reef Ball Foundation, a US-based non-profit organization. The presentation was open to their guests and associates as well as to the general public alike. Marriott encouraged locals to attend this meeting as they recognize the importance of involving the community in the future of our ecosystem. This is central to the foundation’s effort as they advocate the practice of innovative public education projects which operate under the notion that in order to ensure success of projects such as these; a collective effort is paramount. This is exactly the journey that they embarked upon with the support of the hosting hotel, Marriott Beach Resort, and also in collaboration with the Department of Environment.

The informational presentation was conducted by Dr. Catherine Jadot, accredited with a PHD in marine biology, as she focused primarily on the ecological importance of near shore habitats (particularly mangroves and reefs) in Cayman. In attendance at the presentation were members of the Department of Tourism, Marriott’s associates and in-house guests, as well as several members of the local community. Dr. Jadot discussed how the ecosystems were damaged by the combination of natural and manmade disturbances, in particular-the devastation caused by Hurricane Ivan. She explained what reef balls are and how reef ball technology works in restoring damaged ecosystems. Dr. Jadot drove home the message to her audience that the best method of protecting these ecosystems is conservation, education, and public awareness, urging; “No form of restoration will ever be as superior as conserving the natural ecosystem.” Marriott is on board with the foundation’s message that it is paramount that as a community we become pre-emptive in our efforts by preventing, and as such; avoiding damage to our reefs to begin with. “Restoration efforts should be considered as a last measure and not as an alternative way of "making up" for damage,” stated Dr. Jadot.

All of last week the volunteers from the foundation built reef balls by the Marriott pool, inviting guests and anyone interested to participate. Along with the actual operation of building the reef balls, a huge goal of this foundation is to involve the local community by educating people about what they can do to preserve and protect the natural reef ecosystem. During the presentation on Friday Dr. Jadot explained much of what they did during their time on Island, including their effort throughout the week of transplanting young coral into tiny cups to be placed by divers into the reef balls.

It was followed up by a lively discussion about reef balls, other environmental restoration efforts, and the future of the Cayman Islands in general. “It was great to see members of the local community, as well as our associates, not only attend the presentation, but also participating in the discussions,” said Walter Regidor, Managing Director of the Marriott. “Locals voiced their opinions and shared their concerns and experiences from years of living in the Cayman Islands. It was very intriguing and thought-provoking.” The Reef Ball Foundation is dedicated to using the best available technology, and to facilitate this they rely appreciably on the input of concerned citizens. Concerned citizens can contribute a wealth of information about the local ecology, the conditions, and the techniques that aid

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in supplementing and refining existing techniques and in turn; enabling the enhancement of these techniques ensuring our Island's future.

After a week of intense labour and great effort the presentation offered the ultimate opportunity to educate people on what they can do to assist in preserving our ecosystem as a whole. The key point of the presentation that was drummed into the audience's minds was; "Conservation; not Restoration."

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