



Collier County Government

Public Services Division
Coastal Zone Management
3301 E. Tamiami Tr.
Naples, FL 34112

Public Information Coordinator
Camden Smith
(239) 252-5326

www.colliergov.net/coastalzonemanagement
www.twitter.com/collierpio www.facebook.com/colliergov
www.youtube.com/CollierGov

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

COUNTY SEEKS NAVY SHIP FOR ARTIFICIAL REEF

(Naples, FL) – The Board of County Commissioners on Tuesday, April 27 approved staff’s request to seek acquisition of a retired guided-missile frigate ship to use as an artificial reef in the Gulf of Mexico off the Collier County coast.

Six months ago, citizen Mike Taworski, brought the idea of deploying the USS George Philip to county staff. Since then, a group of individuals including county staff and officials from the City of Naples, Marine Industries Association, Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission, Collier County Sheriff’s Office and the Collier County Sea Grant Agent have been working diligently on this initiative.

In 2003, the Navy decommissioned the USS George Philip which is a 455-foot Oliver Hazard Perry Class Navy Ship. The U.S. Navy named the ship after Naval Academy graduate George Philip Jr. who came from a family with a long history of dedication to military service. Captain Philip of the USS Twiggs died in combat on June 16, 1945 during the World War II Battle for Okinawa. The U.S. Navy award Philip with a Silver Star for service on the USS O’Bannon and the Navy Cross for his service on the USS Twiggs.

George Philip’s two children are supportive of using the ship as an artificial reef to improve the Southwest Florida ecosystem. In a letter of support, daughter Snow Philip of Key West, FL wrote, “My father lies in an unmarked grave off the coast of Okinawa. His brother and uncle also rest somewhere in the Pacific Ocean. What better fate could this have than to commemorate the dead by becoming a site for new life?”

By using the inactive Naval ship, commissioned in 1978, as an artificial reef, marine life will be provided with a long-term habitat in the Gulf of Mexico. The reef will provide a new attraction and recreational amenity as well as additional fishing and diving opportunities. The project will also encourage tourism for this historic site and will preserve the legacy of the family for which the Navy named the ship.

The Naval Inactive Ships Maintenance Facility in Bremerton, WA is currently holding the vessel for scrapping. Collier County will now contact federal legislators in an effort to successfully negotiate the retired ship’s move to Collier County, FL to take on its new purpose in becoming a hub for marine life.

“We are grateful for the family’s support and the many public and private agencies in our own community who have been involved in helping us with the initial planning of the project as well as identifying fundraising needs. We feel that the George Philip will provide an economic and environmental benefit to Collier County as a whole,” said Coastal Zone Management Environmental Specialist Pamela Keyes.

The project will be paid for by donations and managed by Collier County’s Coastal Zone Management Department.