

The Caribbean Coral Reef Institute (CCRI) continues to sponsor management driven research on coral reefs in Puerto Rico. Distributed to each of you is a copy of our most recent newsletter highlighting some of our latest developments. Additional copies are available, and it will soon be posted on the CCRI web site.

This March 15, CCRI will inaugurate its new facilities built with funds from the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez. Representatives from NOAA will be led by your co-chairman, Mr. Tim Keeney, while the local government will be represented by the Hon. Anibal Acevedo Vilá, Governor of Puerto Rico. You are all invited.

CCRI is now beginning a 3-year, \$1.4 million project from NOAA-CSCOR's Coral Reef Ecosystems Studies Program. This "Deep CRES" program seeks to study coral reefs between 50 and 100 m and represents a collaborative effort across disciplines within the University's Department of Marine Sciences. Its objectives are (1) to characterize the distribution and extent of deep reefs and the organisms that comprise deep reef communities, (2) determine the physical, biological and genetic connections and dependencies between deep and shallow reefs, and (3) assess the vulnerability of deep reefs by comparing species compositions and rates of growth, recruitment, bleaching and disease in areas of different levels of stress.

Field sampling and quantitative surveys will be made by a team of 5 divers consisting of faculty, staff and graduate students, who will be trained in technical, mixed-gas, rebreather diving overseen by NOAA's National Undersea Research Center at the University of North Carolina – Wilmington, with initial training occurring at their facility in Key Largo, FL. To support these efforts, a deep-diving facility will be set up at the Magueyes Island Marine Laboratory. This represents the first such facility in Puerto Rico for academic studies. It is our hope to become a regional center in support of deep reef research across the academic community, and we look forward to further our collaboration with NOAA's National Undersea Research Program. To this end, we have just submitted a proposal to the National Science Foundation to upgrade the physical facilities supporting the dive program at the Marine Lab.

CCRI is collaborating with the PR Department of Natural and Environmental Resources and co-sponsoring their First Coral Reef Symposium to be held April 11 at the new San Juan Convention Center. CCRI is very excited to be a part of this, and 14 CCRI-sponsored projects will be presenting results. I am sure that Aida Rosario, in her report for Puerto Rico will elaborate on this event.

Lastly, as soon as FY07 funding levels for CCRI are determined, we will be announcing our next Request for Proposal solicitation for new projects over the two-year period 2008-2009. In this effort, we are collaborating with the University of Puerto Rico Sea Grant College Program, who just issued their most recent RFP, with an eye to potentially co-fund coral reef projects.