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### Gore celebrates NSU's reef center opening

By Ariel Barkhurst, Sun Sentinel

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HOLLYWOOD



Doctoral candidate Dorothy Ellen Abigail Renegar shows a coral tank to former Vice President Al Gore as the University's Dean Richard Dodge , President George anbury and Master's candidate Kerri Lyn O'Neil look on at the opening of Nova Southeastern's Coral Reef Research Center on Thursday, September 27, 2012, in Hollywood. (Miami Herald/Patrick Farrell / September 28, 2012)

A national reputation in oceanography and the perfect location helped Nova Southeastern secure millions of federal dollars to build the largest coral reef research center in the country.

NSU celebrated the grand opening of its \$50 million Center for Excellence in Coral Reef Ecosystems Research on Thursday with a speech by former vice president Al Gore.

"Coral reef ecosystems can be saved by the research going on in this facility," said Gore, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007 with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. NSU kept him informed "of just about every brick that was put into place," he said.

The university is located near 80 percent of the reefs in America, one of the several reasons NSU secured a competitive \$15 million federal grant for scientific research to build the center, said Billy Causey, southeast regional director for the National Oceanic Atmospheric Association

The components of the center allow researchers there to study a wide variety of aspects of reef health and synthesize the results, he said.

And the center is by far the largest coral reef research center in the country, said Paul Sandifer, another speaker at the ceremony and a Senior Science Advisor at NOAA.

It has many capabilities no other coral reef research center has, Sandifer said, allowing it to conduct experiments and uncover information about coral reefs that would otherwise never be uncovered.

"It's highly significant, nationally," he said. "There is no other facility nationally that has the capacity to do the ecosystem-level research they'll do here."

Congresswoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz, who was celebrating her 46<sup>th</sup> birthday, also spoke Thursday.

Reefs house 25 percent of the ocean's biodiversity and yet, Wasserman Schultz pointed out, are dying so fast that a fourth of the world's reefs already have been lost for good.

"I look forward to bragging to my colleagues about this center," she said.

Gore focused his comments on the effects of carbon dioxide on the ocean and on reefs.

"The two threats that are most serious to our oceans are global in nature, and those are the rise in temperature from global warming, and the acidification of the ocean that is caused by the same thing as global warming," he said. "The solution is to stop putting all this pollution in the air."

The ocean acidification and global warming Gore mentioned can be studied at NSU now, Sandifer said. The research center has large and expensive tanks that allow them to simulate ocean conditions and change temperature and pH to study how coral might be able to survive in the ocean after what humans have done to it.

Gore said his first scuba diving experience was among the reefs off the coast of South Florida. The experience was so moving, he said, it remains part of the reason for his devotion to protecting the world's ecosystems.

"That visceral sense of amazement at the world of coral reefs is one of the many reasons for the passion people bring to the project of protecting them," he said.

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