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UWCK Seeks Request for Proposals for \$2.5M Towards Reef Revitalization

Monroe County, Florida — In celebration of the one-year anniversary of *Mission: Iconic Reefs*, United Way of Collier and the Keys (UWCK) is pleased to announce the scheduled release of the 'Reef Revitalization' Request for Proposals (RFP) on January 6th, 2021 to support coral restoration. This grant opportunity is part of UWCK's larger initiative -- 'Revitalizing the Florida Keys through Reef Restoration and Beyond,' with support from the United Arab Emirates.

Over the course of the next five years, \$2,500,000 will be available to coral restoration practitioners for *Mission: Iconic Reefs*. The application for funding will be open through the UWCK grant management portal from January 6 - February 15, 2021. Applicants will be required to provide a 1:1 private sector match on awarded funds, culminating in a total of \$5,000,000 towards restoration. This \$5,000,000 could, in turn, be used as a match on governmental funds for a potential of \$10,000,000 invested in coral restoration in the Florida Keys. Restoration work will focus on up to four of the seven *Iconic Reefs* (*Sombrero, Looe Key, Horseshoe, and Carysfort*). Grant priorities will focus on Phase 1A of *Mission: Iconic Reefs*, financial impacts to the Monroe County ALICE population, community stewardship and volunteer strategies, and engagement with students studying in related marine-science fields.

In February of 2020, the United Way of Collier and the Keys announced a \$3.5 million gift from the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The investment is intended to fund cutting-edge and innovative projects in support of reef restoration and education, including the first significant funding towards *Mission: Iconic Reefs*, one of the largest restoration efforts in the world. This gift was the final portion of the UAE's pledged \$10 million assistance to the State of Florida in response to Hurricane Irma in 2017, representing the UAE's commitment to assist communities in the United States during their time of need and to help them be stronger moving forward.

With this initiative, UWCK's goal is to revitalize the very lifeblood of the Florida Keys community, the coral reefs, while supporting sustainability through related education. By physically restoring the local coral reefs, it will improve coastal protection and provide economic stability for residents. This furthers UWCK's work creating thriving communities by improving the financial stability of families living paycheck to paycheck and by strengthening health and education.

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 the health of coral reefs in Florida, and to protect the economy that depends on the reefs. NOAA 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.

Healthy coral reefs provide habitat for recreationally and commercially important fish and a multitude of other animals. Continued loss of coral reefs could result in cascading effects to the Florida Keys region's economy and culture, which are firmly rooted in the local marine ecosystem. This unique habitat generates billions of dollars in recreation and tourism.

“UWCK is excited to expand our role in supporting the local community on this project that is so critical to the well-being of most of our residents. For a community that is highly dependent on its natural resources, this moment is a turning point in our local history and has the potential to be the inspiration for worldwide change.” said UWCK Keys Area President, Leah Stockton.

Additional Information including the full Request for Proposals and application will be available through the UWCK website and social media on January 6th.

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About United Way of Collier and the Keys

The 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.