

Coral World hosts Reef Fest today at Coki Beach

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ST. THOMAS — Grab the family and head to Coral World Ocean Park on Coki Beach today for the fifth annual Reef Fest.

The annual event is a family-friendly day of fun and learning about coral reefs and the territory's natural environment.

From 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. today, admission to Coral World is free and the park is offering a free shuttle service from Sugar Bay.

"Reef Fest celebrates the coral reef. It is about empowering the local community to protect coral reefs. It is a day dedicated to learning about the bond between humans and the reef, and about what each person can do to cultivate that relationship in a positive way," Coral World director of Marketing Valerie Peters said.

The day will feature sand castle sculpting, guided reef and coastal tours, learning how to kayak, paddleboard and snorkel appropriately around coral reefs, live music, educational booths and educational games, such as Human Ocean Bingo and Marine Jeopardy.

At 10 a.m., The Nature Conservancy and the Virgin Islands Reef Resilience Program will con-



Daily News File Photo
Ashely Mills, left, Alexis Mills, A'Janiya Emmanuel, Kimisha Stewart and A'janae Emmanuel feel stingrays during Reef Fest 2012 at the Stingray Lagoon at Coral World on St. Thomas.

duct BleachWatch training for anyone interested in the agency's volunteer coral reef monitoring program.

BleachWatch is a voluntary program in which divers or snorkelers take a portion of any dive or swim to

perform a quick and easy survey of the reef and record any bleaching they find. A simple data sheet will guide

the diver through their observations and then can be submitted directly to the BleachWatch Database.

The training is free and open to the public and will last about one hour. Meet at the Coral World Caribbean Reef Encounter Exhibit at 10 a.m. today to learn more.

In the past, Reef Fest has been organized by the Sea Grant Marine Outreach Program's Virgin Islands Marine Advisory Service at the University of the Virgin Islands, but the event was in jeopardy when federal funding dried up.

Sam Mitchell, Virgin Islands Marine Advisory Service said: "The University of the Virgin Islands' VIMAS program's mission is to improve the public's knowledge and stewardship of the marine environment. Reef Fest presents us with a unique opportunity to interact with and learn about marine creatures and the reef they inhabit at no cost."

This year, Coral World is donating the use of its facility to the event.

"We are thrilled to help keep Reef Fest going because it is a perfect match to Coral World's mission," Coral World General Manager Trudie Prior said.

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