

Clothing line gets people talking about ocean

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FLORIDA KEYS — Butterfly fish and sea turtles on an oceanic lifestyle shirt first catch the eye. A longer look brings the message home.

“The images on the shirts look almost photographic, so good that it takes people a minute. Then they notice the cans, plastic bags, bottles and all the other stuff in the water,” said Robert Barnes, a South Florida architect who started the new Save Bait Life apparel line.

The Save Bait Life line of T-shirts, tank tops, sun-protection rash guards, tote bags and flip-flops made its public debut at February’s Gigantic Nautical Flea Market at Founders Park in Islamorada.

“We’ll see how it goes, but so far, people love ‘em,” Barnes said.

He enlisted Sushila Oliphant, an artist and graphic designer, to create the artwork.

“Robert had this great idea and I thought it was fabulous,” Oliphant said. “Wearing one of these shirts, you need not say anything. People look closer and see all the garbage and plastics in the water, and it starts a conversation.”

John Barnes, a charter captain out of Ocean Reef Club and Robert’s son, confirmed that.

“We get amazing reactions from people,” John said. “We gave some [apparel] to the staff at MarineMax of Ocean Reef and they’re wearing them outside nearly every day. One of the girls said she was in line at a store and everyone asked her about them, and wanted to know where to buy them.”

Robert Barnes was visiting a boat show with a friend when the topic turned to stemming the deteriorating state of the ocean environment and its effect on fish and marine mammals.

“Well, bait life matters, too,” someone commented.

Without bait fish, all the other ocean species would perish.

“It seemed like a no-brainer,” Barnes said.

When clients of Barnes’ architectural firm — he designed the Morada Bay Beach Cafe and Pierre’s Restaurant in Islamorada, among with other Keys homes and commercial buildings — saw Oliphant’s prototype shirts in his office, they offered to buy them off the hangers.

“[From] pumping our sewage waste into the Gulf Stream to discarding plastic bottles, wrappers and containers, it is an ongoing state of denial by the entire global populations,” says a Save Bait Life mission statement. The company aims “to help bring awareness to our self-centered lifestyles which harm Mother Earth and, eventually, all of us.”

Designs include snook and dolphin applied to “T-shirts and other cool stuff to raise awareness.”

An award-winning artist for landscapes and other subjects, Oliphant said, “This is a different kind of thing. It’s spiritual.”



At the recent Gigantic Nautical Flea Market in Islamorada, Save Bait Life founder Robert Barnes, artistic designer Sushila Oliphant and Debie Lee unveil the apparel lifestyle line that raises awareness about pollution’s effects on the ocean ecosystem.