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During the week, they draft briefs, argue motions and negotiate corporate deals.

But in their off-hours, these South Florida lawyers, judges and other legal professionals strap on flippers and dive into the ocean, just seeing the sights or doing volunteer work to improve the marine environment.

The 130 or so members of the group DiveBar have tagged sharks for the University of Miami and sponsored conservation research at [Nova Southeastern University](#). Now in their most ambitious effort yet, they are working with NSU to build a living coral reef on what was once a barren stretch of rocky ocean floor off northern [Fort Lauderdale](#).

"They needed manpower and money, and we were looking for something to do to make a difference," said the group's founder, Robert Kelley, a Fort Lauderdale trial lawyer. "The reefs off Fort Lauderdale used to be magnificent. We're trying to bring them back."

In three dives, the DiveBar members went to NSU's undersea coral nursery, detached more than 1,000 staghorn corals and took them to the site of the planned reef. They attached the corals to the rocky floor and then let nature take its course, allowing them to grow and attract fish and other marine life.

"They like to dive, they're good divers, and they want to help," said Richard Dodge, dean of Nova's Oceanographic Center. "Our efforts with the nursery are both scientific and conservation oriented. The science part is to better understand how to grow corals, transplant them, and have them survive to restore reefs."

Staghorn corals are federally protected as a threatened species. The Nova scientists working with DiveBar have grown a variety of genetic variants and arranged for them to be distributed widely on the reef to enhance the species' chances of survival.

Dave Black, a corporate and real estate lawyer in Fort Lauderdale who just stepped down as DiveBar's president, said the members of the group had to learn how to handle the corals, keep them alive during the trip to their new home and then how to attach them firmly enough to keep them in place.

Black, who learned to dive at 12 on Caribbean vacations, said the new reef is already showing signs of growth.

"After three months, corals planted four or five inches apart had already grown so much that they were already interconnecting," he said. "I saw a juvenile fish under one."

The group has plans for other volunteer efforts, such as teaching wounded veterans how to dive. They can only work on their new reef during the winter because that's when marine conditions are favorable to the grafting and growth of corals.

They plan to be back next winter to continue working on it.

"When you're diving, you're having fun with your friends," Black said. "But this way, you're also giving back."