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**GRAY'S REEF CELEBRATES 25TH ANNIVERSARY
WITH HONORS FOR
ATLANTA BUSINESSMAN BERNIE MARCUS**

Atlanta, GA – Atlanta businessman and civic leader Bernie Marcus is being honored with the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation (NMSF) Stewardship Award during a gala tribute dinner to celebrate the 25th anniversary of Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary. NMSF Trustee and National Geographic Society Explorer-in-Residence, Sylvia Earle will present the award at the gala, September 7th at the Georgia Aquarium.

The Home Depot co-founder Bernie Marcus is being honored with the NMSF Stewardship Award for being a visionary in ocean literacy by creating the Georgia Aquarium, bringing the wonders of the ocean to the State of Georgia and beyond. His generous contribution will ensure that the Atlanta community has the ability to become one of the most ocean literate communities in North America.

"It's a great honor to receive this recognition from the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, particularly during the Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary's Silver Anniversary year," said Bernie Marcus. "Because few people actually get to go under the sea to glimpse at our marine treasures...like Gray's Reef, our conservation efforts on land are far more prominent than those in the water. My vision for the Georgia Aquarium is to bring these treasures to the people of the great State of Georgia, particularly the children, instilling in them a tradition of ocean stewardship for generations to come."

World renowned marine biologist and NMSF Trustee Dr. Sylvia Earle will present the award to Mr. Marcus. "Bernie is a true inspiration," said Earle. "His extraordinary vision and gift--the Georgia Aquarium--will help ensure the work of marine scientists reaches the masses and can have a true impact on conservation efforts."

Atlanta Businessman and Civic Leader Bernie Marcus; Georgia State House of Representative Members Roger Bruce, Sharon Beasley-Teague and Shelia Jones; Chatham County Commissioners Patrick Farrell, Pete Liakakis and Helen Stone; Atlanta Council Member Mary Norwood; NOAA, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Oceans & Atmosphere Tim Keeney; NMSF Trustee and National Geographic Explorer-in-Residence Dr. Sylvia Earle; Executive Director of the Georgia Aquarium Jeff Swanagan; and the Honorable Lindsay Thomas, Senior VP of Government Relations for AGL Resources will be in attendance.

“This is such an extraordinary and fitting way to celebrate the 25th anniversary of Gray’s Reef National Marine Sanctuary and the window to our ocean world created by Bernie Marcus with the Georgia Aquarium,” said Gray’s Reef National Marine Sanctuary Superintendent Reed Bohne. “Clearly the investment of time and talent required by so many to build and maintain this magnificent aquarium reminds us of the importance we must place in our own commitment to sustain and protect the ocean natural areas that so inspired Mr. Marcus.”

Gray’s Reef National Marine Sanctuary is one of the largest near shore live-bottom reefs in the southeastern U.S. It is located 17.5 nautical miles off Sapelo Island, GA, in waters 70 feet deep. Gray’s Reef consists of sandstone outcroppings and ledges up to three meters in height with sandy, flat-bottomed troughs between. The sanctuary lies in a transition area between temperate and tropical waters where reef fish populations change seasonally and threatened loggerhead sea turtles forage and rest at the reef. It is near the only known calving ground for the highly endangered North Atlantic right whales. Gray’s Reef was designated as a sanctuary January 16, 1981 and was recognized as an international Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO in 1986. Because of the diversity of marine life, Gray’s Reef is one of the most popular sport fishing and diving destinations in Georgia.

“We are delighted to celebrate such a significant milestone for Gray’s Reef National Marine Sanctuary and to honor one of Georgia’s greatest friends, Bernie Marcus,” said NMSF President and CEO Lori Arguelles. “Tonight we celebrate both the past 25 years of conservation efforts at Gray’s Reef as well as future efforts, which can only be enhanced thanks to the presence of the Georgia Aquarium and partnership efforts with Gray’s Reef staff.”

The gala tribute is being hosted by the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation. Sponsors include The Blank Family of Business, Masco Corporation, Aquasis, The Coca-Cola Company, Georgia Power Company, Alston & Bird LLP, Peachtree Ford/Wheeler/Kolb Management Co., AGL Resources, Jim Jacoby, Jacoby Development, Inc. and The Ocean Foundation

The National Marine Sanctuary Foundation is the private, non-profit partner to the federally managed National Marine Sanctuary System; and was created to inspire all people to preserve, protect and promote our nationwide network of marine sanctuaries. These 14 marine protected areas encompass more than 150,000 square miles of marine and Great Lakes waters stretching from the Florida Keys to the Hawaiian Islands, from Lake Huron to the Gulf of Mexico. Through public and private sector partnerships the Foundation creates conservation-based research, education and outreach programs designed to connect the public with these special ocean and coastal resources.