

The NewsRoom
Release: #3633
Date: April 6, 2007

MMS Oceanographer Receives Avent Medal

The George Institute for Biodiversity and Sustainability Presents Award

WASHINGTON - For scientists like Thomas E. Ahlfeld, Ph.D., a biological oceanographer with the Minerals Management Service (MMS), recognition by one's peers is a high honor. Dr. Ahlfeld was recognized during the recent Fulbright Academy of Science and Technology Conference in Panama City, Panama, where he was presented with the Robert Avent Medal by the George Institute for Biodiversity and Sustainability (GIBS).

The Avent medal recognizes individuals for their marine research, managerial and administrative skills, and experience. The medal, founded by the GIBS board of directors, honors the memory of Robert Avent, Ph.D., a biological oceanographer, who died in 2003. Dr. Avent's research contributions included cold coral ecology (*Oculina* reefs off the Florida coast) and a focus on conservation of deep water ecosystems in conjunction with oil and gas drilling and production activities in the Gulf of Mexico Region. He was also a dedicated member of MMS for 27 years.

"Recognition by your peers is an especially high honor and I am proud to be the 2007 recipient of this medal," Dr. Ahlfeld said. "This award has special meaning to me. I knew Bob Avent as a fellow graduate student at Florida State University, a co-worker at MMS, and a friend."

GIBS president and CEO Robert Y. George, Ph.D., presented the medal to Dr. Ahlfeld for "...his dedicated work on conservation of chemosynthetic ecosystems and the deep-sea coral *Lophelia* reef ecosystems in the Gulf of Mexico." A non-profit organization, GIBS is dedicated to conservation of nature whether it is land, air or water (ocean, lakes, estuaries and rivers) and is fully devoted to the fundamental principles of conservation as envisaged by President Theodore Roosevelt, who created the National Parks.

"I worked with Bob on all of the deep-sea biological studies conducted by MMS in the Gulf of Mexico," said Dr. Ahlfeld. "These studies have been critical to MMS decision making as oil and natural gas development has moved steadily into deeper areas of the Gulf."

With more than 30 years of experience in marine environmental research and management, Dr. Ahlfeld's current research management focuses on benthic ecology, marine environmental monitoring, and the biological effects of offshore oil and natural gas development. His responsibilities include ensuring research information is provided in a format that is most readily usable in the decision making process. His works is not only with the Gulf of Mexico Region, but also with all of the MMS Regional Offices.

Dr. Ahlfeld is the third recipient of the Avent medal; past winners include John Reed, Ph.D., of the Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute in Fort Pierce, Fla.; and William Hogarth, Ph.D., Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.