

# The Scuba Sports Club of Westchester, New York

Our 47th year serving the local and northeast dive community !

## *The Scuba Sport Club's Fall/Winter 2021-2022 Newsletter*



### **The Anchor Line**

**Melissa Lonquich, President**



Hello Fellow Divers! Welcome to our Fall/Winter 2022 edition of Sea Swells! For those of you that are new to the club, you're in for a treat! First and foremost, I want to thank all our members who were able to attend this year's holiday party, and our amazing directors for all their help with planning and running it (and of course Nick Lappano for assisting us as well). It took months in the making and was all worth it for such a wonderful event! The party was the first time most of us have seen one another in almost two years and it couldn't have gone any better! We had a huge turn out and everyone seemed to have a blast (I know I did!). Those that could not attend, you were surely missed!

I want to congratulate none other than our environmental director, Judy Dronzek, for achieving the diver of the year award for 2021! I can't think of a more deserving person! For those of you that missed it I wanted to share some of the other cool awards given out this year (Charlie Adams for the "live aboard newbie award" celebrating his first time on a live aboard, Judy Dronzek and John Frercks on their "Iron Diver" award for completing every dive on their last live aboard trip, Liza Handziak on receiving the "Bright Idea" award for always coming up with awesome ideas for new and adventurous ways for us to get together, Sheri Buchman for the "Sea Stumbler" award for always finding a new and creative way to take a tumble, Albert Miller for the "Wet-Dry Suit Diver" award for somehow finding a way to dive wet in a dry suit, and of course, we celebrated our "Newest Diver" Melissa Miceli for recently completing both her open water and advanced open water certification with the help of fellow members, Pat Constantine and Joe Rinaldi.... And she did it all with God-awful viz and handled it like a champ!! Let's not forget the newest recipient of the "Friggin Zigahn" award, Jack Ricotta... I can't imagine how happy Al and Sandy Miller were to finally get that goat head out of their house!! A huge congratulations to Bernie Schmitt for winning this year's trip raffle!!! I'm sure he's going to have a blast!

Updates for this year; Our plan was to begin holding in person meetings again starting January but the Omicron variant had other plans for us! Keep an eye on your emails to stay on top of when we can begin meeting in person again. Don't forget the LIDA film festival is right around the corner! They will be doing it virtually again this year. I know Jack has organized so many upcoming trips in the works for 2022 already, and will be emailing about even more soon! I can't wait to see what Liza, our social director extraordinaire, comes up with for us to try next! Here's to a great 2022 to come!

As always, thank you all for being the best part of TSSC! Without each and every one of you, we would not be the great club we are today!

Very Truly Yours,

Melissa Lonquich  
TSSC President



## Sea Swells Log

Ken Andreu, Newsletter Editor

Into a third year of Covid, I think we are learning to surf the pandemic tides. Granted we still zoomed in January, but we also partied face to face in December. Melissa has been navigating the pandemic shoals while keeping the club enthusiasm alive. Ed fills the fins of second in command. Michelle keeps the directors on an even keel and maintains the course headings. Judy our DOY is always on the lookout for worthy environmental causes and, of course, rabbits.

Jack has managed to score a few dive trips in the books for 2021 and is on a roll for 2022. Amanda the Antarctic explorer has kept our speaker's podium full every month. Joe keeps us focused on the right and safe way to get there. Liza rallied members to alternate recreational activities. Kevin established an online TSSC souvenir shop. Kenny has always amazed us with his eye and humor. Gene is the spark plug that keeps the Board moving forward. Sheri keeps the books in the black which is no mean feat. Gary is the powerplant for this volume you are reading. I am learning to sip air through my regulator rather than gulp.

Life changes, the challenges arise and we learn to meet them and face new tomorrows. Covid is a challenge. As divers, we challenge ourselves by pushing the limits of our own personal skill sets in an environment we no longer call home. Often, we learn from trial and error, mistakes and breakthroughs.

As a club, we have an advantage. We are a diving community. We have strength in numbers. Our membership has a broad base of skills and knowledge. We can learn from each other, share experiences and move forward together. Quoting Eleanor Roosevelt, **"Learn from the mistakes of others.. You can't live long enough to make them all yourself."**

Sea Swells is one of our forums for sharing when we are not face to face. Ultimately it is a conduit to others who share the same passion. Take advantage of it as the need arises. It is here for you, the membership. And in that vein, I am asking members to submit articles, comments and insights on whatever SCUBA/Sport venue or interest they would like to explore or develop. I guess, as my new title is Editor, you can send it titled Letter to the [Editor](#) (click the blue) and I will follow up on it. I appreciate the confidence Melissa and Gary have in me and the other Board members and Directors for their approval. I will try not to disappoint.

Gary Lehman, Newsletter Publisher

**Welcome to the Fall/Winter 2021-2022 issue of The Scuba Sports Club Sea Swells.** This issue is dedicated to the memory of our friend and long-time columnist in Sea Swells, Rick D'Amico. Rick wrote the **Featured Creature** column for as long as I can remember. We will miss his witty and informative columns, his big easy smile, his service and his friendship. During quiet moments and spectacular sunsets, we shall remember you.

Sadly, we also bid farewell to Dutch Springs. Read about this is Nick's article.

We invite all members of the diving community to contribute; please contact Gary at [gary.a.lehman@gmail.com](mailto:gary.a.lehman@gmail.com) with your articles and photos! Our Club Newsletter includes features about our Club's diving and social calendar; our diving adventures, social/educational events, occasional health issue discussions, and profiles on some of the more colorful and intrepid characters in our local diving community (of which there are many!) — and other features of interest.

Ken Andreu as Newsletter Editor and I will team up and collaborate to bring you the best of TSSC in this and future issues. Welcome aboard, Ken !

Covid put a shroud over much travel and diving in 2021, nevertheless your intrepid TSSC team still got out there and made it happen. So check out the Table of Contents, select your articles of interest, grab a Kombucha or your beverage of choice and ENJOY. I can practically feel the sand between my toes! 2022 looks like a banner year (assuming we can keep the Covid thing under wraps to some extent at least) ... so... STAY TUNED !!

Get vaccinated, get boosterized, make sure your family and friends do the same, STAY HEALTHY, get into shape if need to, get your PADI Reactivate or take your refresher course, make your plans, dream of diving, and make all your dreams come true — with... **The Scuba Sports Club !**



## In This Issue ...



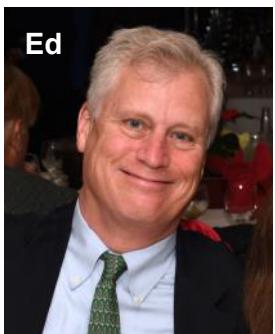
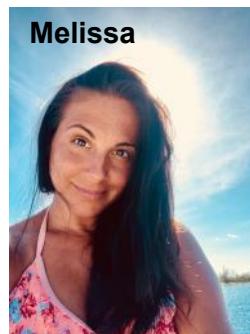
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## TSSC CLUB OFFICERS and DIRECTORS 2022

( ...We always welcome our Club membership  
to join the leadership team !!! )



President

Melissa Lonquich

Vice President

Ed Van Dolsen

Secretary

Michelle Memoli

Membership

Kevin Cushing

Dive Planning

Jack Ricotta

Treasurer

Sheri Buchman



Program Director

Amanda Slattery

Director at Large

Gene Miceli

Executive Director

Kenneth Salstrom

Past President

Al Miller

Newsletter Editor

Ken Andreu



Newsletter Publisher

Gary Lehman

Environment and Legislative

Judy Keznord

Safety and Education

Joe Rinaldi

Social Director

Liza Handziak



Webmaster

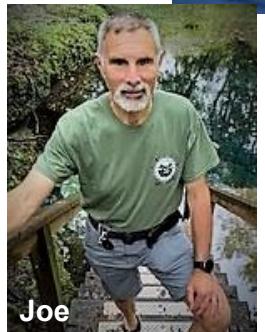
Gene Miceli

Founder

Zig Zigahn (Ad Astra)

Co-Founder

Soliman Shenouda





## What's on ZOOM ??

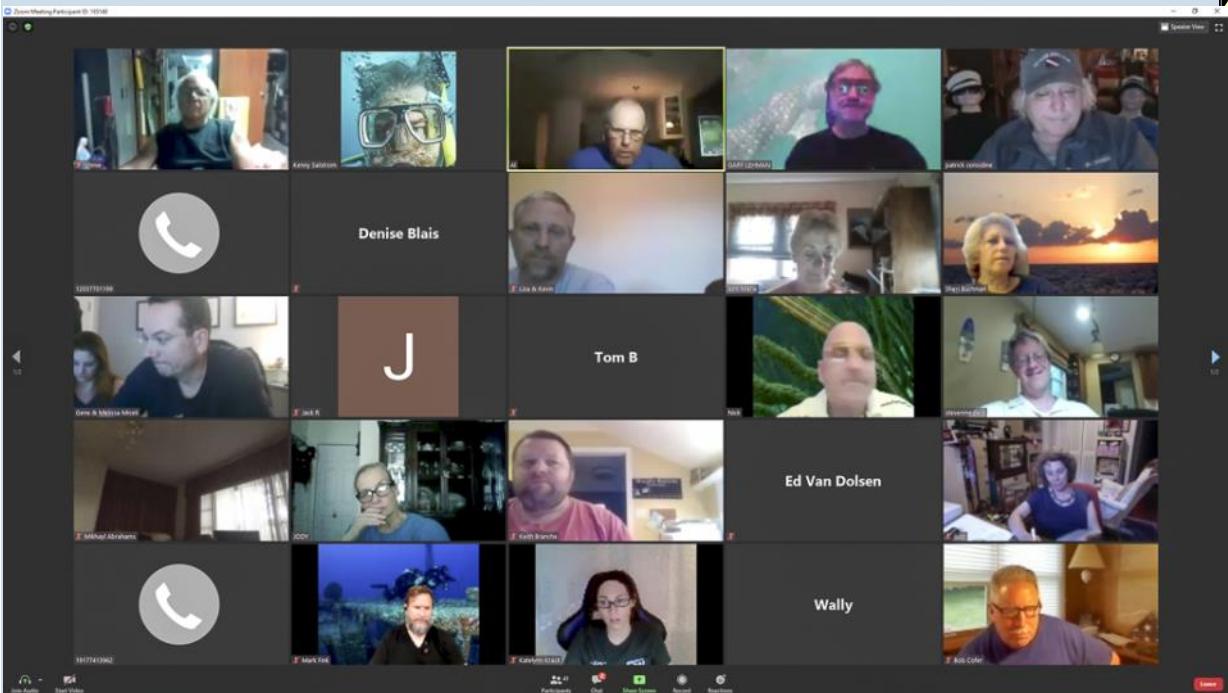
Who is ZOOMING WHO !!

**Kenny Salstrom**  
Executive Director

**Gene Miceli**  
Director-At-Large



**Our General Meetings have been great on Zoom....**



**Keeping our Club together, in style !  
Keeping the scuba diving dreams, ALIVE !!!**

**BUT WE WILL VERY HAPPY TO GET BACK TO IN-PERSON !!!**





## **Heartfelt congratulations to the 2021 DIVER OF THE YEAR,**

**J-U-D-Y “D” !!!**

As many of you are likely aware, Judy was the recipient of the 2021 TSSC Diver of the Year and was presented with this award last month at our holiday party.

For those who read the nominations for all three of the deserving candidates, you have a perspective on the qualities that become important in receiving the honor.

For Judy, she has been leading the charge for quite a few years for the club on environmental issues which most if not all divers will find importance in. I personally am inspired by her commitment and willingness to have our voices heard through various levels of our government.

While Judy's contributions on this topic are impressive this is hardly all she does for the benefit of divers. Again, the thoughtful nominations she received put a lot of attention on several other areas that I believe were well-deserved recognition.

Judy has opened her lakeside home to the club for several years for the benefit of our summer BBQ, and her volunteer work at the Maritime Aquarium are again just more examples of the qualities of a DOY. Judy has a nickname in the Miceli home – she is referred to as ‘Judy Hopps’ as my kids were quite young when they first met her. Upon learning of her love for bunnies and her rescue work, they quickly pointed out a fictional character from a 2016 Disney movie, Zootopia who is a rabbit with this name. What are the odds! Google this – too funny.

On behalf of the TSSC Board, we congratulate Judy and look forward to many more years working and diving with you—*and more importantly, just enjoying your company!*

Keep up all the good work you do – we are all better off as a result.

Gene Miceli  
Director-at-large

## In Memory of our Friend, Rick D'Amico

We miss your big easy smile, buddy...

Stand down, Rick. We have the watch...



- ◊ Coordinated our annual dives at Fort Wetherill and regattas
- ◊ BTS Swim-a-thon for Ocean Pals
- ◊ Diver Of The Year 1991
- ◊ Numerous articles for Sea Swells
- ◊ Coordinator, Long Island Sound Study
- ◊ Certified by Buster Crabbe
- ◊ TSSC Directorships
- \* Education/Safety
- \* Env/Leg.,Newsletter
- Adjunct Professor at Mercy College
- Marine Biologist at NYS Dept. of Environmental Conservation
- Lead Environmental Inspector at Phenix Environmental
- Associate Biologist at Ebasco Environmental
- Environmental Chemist at Pitney Bowes
- Biology/Marine Ecology at University of Bridgeport
- Marine Science at Southampton College of LIU

\* Program,  
Social

### Rick recalls his final dive ...

It was a bright, seasonable October day in 2007, when I made my final scuba dive to top off my 38-year career. I went to Ft. Wetherill State Park, in Jamestown, RI, which has always been my favorite shoreline dive site. I went with my dive club (TSSC) and a couple of other dive clubs from the Metro NY area were there, so I truly felt at home. The event was bittersweet, as I recognized how this would be my last time doing something that had been such an important part of my life. I was having a moment that somewhat resembled Deuteronomy in the show "Cats."

**Rick's Friends, Doug Byrne:** Rick DiAmico passed away this morning at 1130. Rick was a kind man with a good heart . Rick and I taught Scuba together for many years. Rick was a wonderful friend. Rick was a Catholic and a Knight Of Columbus. He served the church .He will be sorely missed. RIP My Brother, till we meet again. Your pain is no more....**Steve Dicosola:** As I tell anyone that has lost someone, we are never really gone because we still exist in the tears in our friend's eyes...**Bob Schupak:** I knew Rick for many years going back to our teaching days at the Durland Scout Center. Last saw him at the Bass Pro archery center a year or two ago. **Danny Levin:** I first met Rick in 1990 as he was helping my YMCA scuba instructor by giving a lecture on marine life we might encounter. He then talked about a great club we could join to meet other divers. Of course he meant TSSC. We kept in touch through the club. He was a spellbinding guy with unlimited knowledge and interests. Miss him...**Robert Schrager:** It is indeed sad news. There aren't enough nice guys in the world that we can take the loss of one like Rick with equanimity....**Tom Cascione** Well that sucks. Rick and I went way back. He was a good guy...**Bob Cofer:** I am so saddened to hear this news. Rick was one of those larger-than-life kind of guys you never forget. I have many fond memories with him that always bring a smile to my face. Now that smile will be a bit melancholy, but it will still be heart felt....**Greg, Fern and Lorene Sta-siuk:** Rick was a devoted member of the Scuba Club and knowing him enriched all of our lives. He will be missed and remembered... **Gary Lehman:** Very sad to learn of his passing. He was ill for a long time. He loved archery! It was a passion of his which he returned to late in life. I will miss shooting the breeze with Rick and we will all miss his wonderful 'Featured Creature' column. Loved talking with Rick about his time with the Coast Guard, he was a Coastie.

.....FAIR WINDS AND FOLLOWING SEAS TO OUR FRIEND RICK....



## Meet Your Directors!

Melissa Lonquich, President

Hello Fellow Divers!

Over the last few years TSSC has had the opportunity to welcome many new members to our club, most of which haven't met all of our board members in person yet! It's for that reason this issue of Sea Swells includes a little background on your club's directors and officers. We'd like to introduce ourselves and share a little about what makes us, well... us!



As your newest president, please allow me to introduce myself and my SCUBA diving history! I started snorkeling when I was 18 and after only a few times I realized how much I loved and needed to see more of the underwater world! The more I experienced, the more I realized I had to see the ocean deeper than just the surface of the water! I completed my open water certification back in 2008. After becoming a more active diver, I started taking specialty courses and eventually I received the rating of master diver. I crossed over to the "pro side" as a dive master and eventually became a PADI instructor in 2019. I currently teach open water and various specialty courses through SCUBA New York in Yonkers.

As a NYC teacher for 18 years now, I can tell you that sometimes it's challenging teaching students' subjects that they aren't always interested in. The cool thing about teaching SCUBA is I can still use my skills as a professional teacher and teach what I LOVE! Even more fulfilling is that my SCUBA students want to learn the material; they're there to learn what I want to teach! It's a win-win for everyone, and such an amazing experience for me to watch beginners become "divers"!

My love and passion for the ocean has taken a "giant stride" into other aspects of my life. I was the host of a rush hour/ prime time radio show called, "Dive into Life" on WVOX for three years, where I interviewed people and not -for-profits that showed a passion for life and what they do. Many of my guests were part of the "who's who" of the dive world, and they shared their expertise and love of the ocean with my audience. In my professional life, it's become a joke at my school, that my students (Which are English language learners) often learn about sharks and the ocean, and there has been many times that their first words spoken in English may or may not have been 'sharks' or 'dorsal fins'. I mean hey... it's still speaking English, right?

As a long-standing member of the club, and previous social director, I decided to take on the challenge of being president of TSSC in 2021 to give back to the club that has given me so much joy over the years! During my time with the club I've seen it grow into something incredibly special and know we will continue to grow and improve our extraordinary and unique club even further! This will be my 2<sup>nd</sup> year as president of TSSC and I strive to continue to serve you well in the coming year! Hope to see you all donned in neoprene soon!

Your President,  
Melissa Lonquich



## Meet Your Directors!

Ed Van Dolsen, Vice President



Hello team, this is your Vice President Ed Van Dolsen. I am 63 years old and started diving because my youngest daughter (Hannah) wanted to learn - so I kept her company. I became a TSSC member in 2017. I enjoy diving with the Club, and hanging out with the members topside as well! We are a very diverse group of people, with different backgrounds and diving interests – but those combine such that we all have a good time together!

I earned Open Water certification in Turks and Caicos in 2014. I have earned a number of certifications over the years. Most recently I earned Decompression Diver, Advanced Nitrox, and Trimix from TDI.

I have enjoyed a lot of warm water diving in the Caribbean as well as Northeast wreck diving off New Jersey starting in April and diving through November. I like all kinds of diving, but my favorite is wreck diving.



## Meet Your Directors!

Michelle Memoli, Secretary



### My inspiration for the Sea

No stranger to the sea, I have been independently swimming since age 4. I extend this gratitude to my parents and entourage of cousins. As a child I have fond memories of summers in Puerto Rico and St. Thomas, enjoying all the sea has to offer. As young as age 3, I recall the fascination of visiting the bioluminescent bays in Puerto Rico. One of my favorites! As I got older, I enjoyed competitive swimming at summer camps. These seasonal pastimes would become family traditions I would later pass on to my son, Mikhayl who began swimming by age 3. His continued fascination of sea exploration and all water sports at such a young age was fascinating. By the time he turned 5, we began attending BTS. In 2nd grade, he completed his first research project - an oral presentation and mini-biography on Jacques Cousteau and the world of scuba. This was the marking point of our journey into the wonders of scuba.

We both received our open water dive certification with Bradley Gaiser. Such a small world - Gene Miceli assisted with some of our pool training back then. Thank you Gene :)

As we were training with Brad over the following 2 years, I would be my son's scuba buddy, a mandate, as he completed the scuba ranger program. At that point in my life, I had stopped swimming underwater due to swimmers ear, however, as parents, we do what we have to for our children. Never did I think I would ever become a scuba diver. Mikhayl continued to go on to advanced dive study certifications and continues to do so. I was still trying to manage my buoyancy. One season, early in our diving careers, we met both the Sea Gypsies and TSSC at BTS. Both Nick Lappano and Al Miller were very endearing and enthusiastic about diving, camaraderie and all TSSC has to offer. I was intrigued and therefore, we had to further investigate this "TSSC" group. In the following months, we arrived at our first TSSC meeting at a local diner. The presentation was memorable: "Sex, Sharks & Rock n Roll"...Mikhayl was 15; the rest is history! Lol.

We are entering our 7th season of membership with TSSC. I have been serving on the TSSC Board as Secretary going into my 4th season. Time passes so quickly! Often I hear members and directors comment that divers are a unique group of people. We are. I am grateful to be part of this membership in which we have the opportunity to forge so many wonderful friendships with seasoned divers with patience and care for one another, including novice divers like myself:) Thanks TSSC!

Cordially, Michelle



## Meet Your Directors!

Kevin Cushing, Membership



I started diving because I don't like getting sunburned. For years, Liza and I had been taking an annual 4th of July trip to the Caribbean for some rest and relaxation and would usually spend a few days snorkeling in the bays and beaches. In 2011 we found ourselves in Grand Cayman and the sun was scorching. One morning in the hotel lobby, I pulled out a brochure advertising a PADI Discover Scuba experience, so we decided to give it a try. After a quick "resort course," we were in the warm, clear waters of Grand Cayman in 30 ft of water over a busted up wreck with tons of fish life. The next summer, in Barbados, we did the same Discover Scuba Experience. That clinched it - we were going to get certified and start diving on our own.

In 2012, we were certified at Dutch Springs :-( 2013 found us taking our annual summer trip to Bonaire to complete the Advanced Open Water certification. We found the independence of Bonaire shore diving really gave us the experience we needed. We've been back to Bonaire 4 times.

Continuing our education in 2014 with the PADI Rescue Diver course, and numerous specialties such as Drysuit, Underwater Photography, and seemingly countless others, we rounded out our education.

Since then, we've been fortunate to be able to travel the world on our scuba trips. In addition to the Caribbean, Highlights include the 1000 Islands in Canada, WWII wrecks in North Carolina, white sharks in Guadalupe, Mexico, Truk Lagoon in Micronesia, and the Red Sea in Egypt with TSSC.

For me, scuba diving provides a pathway to so many aspects of life that I enjoy. Whether it is traveling the world, meeting new people, photography, science, conservation, biology, physics, and all the cool gadgets we get to play with, diving has something for everyone and everything for me.



## Meet Your Directors!

Jack Ricotta, Director of Dive Planning  
(Notes by Melissa Lonquich)



Most of you know Jack as the guy who plans trip after trip for our members to enjoy, each one more exciting than the last! As dive planner, Jack spends endless hours researching destinations he thinks we'd enjoy, and even more time making sure he uses his negotiating skills to get us the best deal possible!

However, there's more to Jack and his involvement in the Club than just planning the trips. Upon first joining our club, Jack became actively involved by providing constructive feedback on how our Club could improve. Jack has held the role of Vice President on our Board of Directors and has served as our Dive Planner for the last several years. In that capacity, he has radically expanded our domestic and international diving program with multiple trips a year, with different budgets in mind.

His efforts have contributed to the ongoing increasing size of our Club, he's even recruited new members from various parts of the US while on TSSC dive trips! Jack has participated in Orchard Beach cleanups, helps put together our yearly holiday parties, hosted TSSC Superbowl parties, and enthusiastically supports many of the other dive clubs in the Northeast such as Long Island Divers Association and Boston Sea Rovers.

Jack has encouraged members to continue their diver certification, urged members to get refresher training, and test out equipment before every trip. Jack first became certified back in 2015, and like many of us hasn't turned back since!



## Meet Your Directors!

Sheri Buchman, Treasurer

### Our Undersea World is Soooo MUCH MORE BEAUTIFUL Than Topside World !!

Sheri Buchman

The first time I actually met the Club was on a liveaboard trip to Turks and Caicos in 2017! This is just the kind of wonderful, friendly, engaging and 'happy place' Club that we are all part of... Jack sent out the e-mail 'first come first served' as always, so immediately I wrote back that I wanted to be a new member to join the group. I sent my membership payment at the same time as the deposit for the liveaboard-I wanted to dive, so what better way...It was an amazing trip. Jack offered to be my gadget buddy, and everyone offered support because I was such an air hog and had horrible buoyancy. THAT is the welcoming kind of Club members we have! We had a such a great time – and it was the first of so many!

This first dive experience with the club is a shoutout to Nick Lappano as he was our Club's membership warrior then– I signed the e-mail gathering list at a Beneath The Sea Expo in 2017 when he was staffing the TSSC booth. He captivated me with his enthusiasm, outreach, and friendliness. Once I spent that week with everyone on the liveaboard, I knew it was a group I wanted to be more connected with. The next November club meeting when it was announced the Treasurer position was open, I put in my name and ran unopposed. I love the role and look forward to many years as Director of this amazing club! Another example of the welcoming kind of Club we have.

My first-time blowing bubbles was in 2000 in Maui. My sister had taken me on a business trip and excursions were covered. The resort offered an *Intro to Scuba* course. I can't say why I wanted to try this excursion out of all the other ones offered, but it seemed like the right choice in Hawaii-gorgeous warm water, beautiful colored fish..... I was hooked!!!!!! I was living in Riverdale (Bronx) at the time and connected with the Manhattan-based Pan Aqua dive shop. We did our open water dives in the Long Island Sound!!!! NOT EXACTLY warm blue water with tons of colorful fish. More like cold pea soup and next to zero visibility! That said, I have not again dived in the Long Island Sound even though it has an incredible history of sunken ships given that this area is the most heavily populated part of the USA. It takes a different kind of diver to relish the cold, green, murky, and dark NY/NJ waters! Maybe this summer??!!!!!!

But warm blue water with colorful fish, **All about it!** I keep my logbook up to date, and I have about 230 dives logged -- mostly in the Caribbean. Some of the trips I did with a New Jersey dive shop with John, but many / most of our diving has been with TSSC. We earned our Advanced Open Water in the Dominican Republic.



## Meet Your Directors!

Sheri Buchman, Treasurer

**Our Undersea World is Soooo MUCH MORE BEAUTIFUL Than Topside World !!**

Sheri Buchman

Wow.. so.. Long Island Sound and Dutch Springs for refresher courses before I joined TSSC and was only diving once a year.. but what I really loved were **Key West and the USS Vandenberg, Turks and Caicos** (beginner divers take note -there is no crying in Scuba Diving), **Bahamas, Roatan, Bonaire** (and spawning ostracods), **Cozumel** (many times), **Playa Del Carmen** (one and ONLY TIME for a cavern dive), **Belize** (and the Blue Hole), **Grenada, Dominican Republic, Cancun, Utila in Honduras** ... do you see a pattern here? (smiley face!).

Like many of us, I usually only get to dive once a year (hopefully that changes). Typically, it takes me a couple of days to get reoriented to diving protocols and the whole diving 'choreography' thing (diving more often with the club it's now down to one day!). I'm so jealous of those in the Club who have more free time to go diving more often! Some of my friends just don't 'get it' – cannot connect with the idea of scuba diving. "WHY!" they ask! I could try to explain but they wouldn't get it... I just feel bad for them that they are not going to experience the extreme beauty and joy of the undersea world!



**Where do I want to return to do more diving?** I would definitely like to return to Hawaii... it has been over 20 years since I dove there, and as soon as Jack plans it-I'm there!!!!!! **Where was my favorite place to dive so far?** I'm not sure I have a favorite, but this past trip to Belize (which was 6 years after my first trip) is probably at the top because of so many different types of schooling fish, curious turtles, and tons of sharks -- and with all our TSSC friends! **Bring it ON !**

Yes, the world below the surface IS so much more beautiful sometimes than the terrestrial world... and let us hope that it always stays beautiful and healthy. Thank you again Jack for arranging these amazing dives for us to all enjoy so thoroughly. I love being your money collector... and... **Last one in the water buys the adult beverages on the next dive trip!**



## **Meet Your Directors! *Amanda Slattery, Program Director***

I have loved the water from an early age. I learned to swim in the English Channel where the waves were strong and the water was so cold I had to be swathed in towels and rewarded with a piece of chocolate after each swim. The beach, where the South Downs meet the sea with sheer chalk cliffs hundreds of feet high, was peppered with tide pools. It was an afternoon's pleasure to explore these and find all the creatures washed up by the sea. For several years a seal made his home on our beach. Back at home I swam with a swim club and competed in breaststroke and backstroke races.

Scuba diving had always appealed and I found I had the opportunity to learn while taking a course at Pace University in 2003. The course covered theory and pool sessions, then I was faced with the choice of where to get my open water certification – a quarry in upstate New York, somewhere in Long Island Sound, or the instructor's annual Caribbean trip which that year was going to Grand Cayman, where visibility would be 100ft and the water 80+ degrees. It was not a difficult choice. I received my open-water and AOW certifications on this trip. For about ten years I traveled with this group for one week per year, visiting Bonaire, Curacao, Turks and Caicos in addition to several return trips to Grand Cayman. I did a couple of dives in Tahiti and Fiji while on business trips, then a liveaboard in the Red Sea out of Sharm el Sheikh. Further exotic locations called and I took a National Geographic trip from Sorong, Indonesia, diving Raja Ampat, the Banda Islands and through the Torres Strait to Papua New Guinea. It was on this trip that I met and dived with Valerie Taylor, one of the scientists on board.

This whetted my appetite for the Pacific and I took another National Geographic trip from Easter Island across the South Pacific to Tahiti, diving off tiny atolls, uninhabited islands and taking the famous drift dive through Fakarava Pass in French Polynesia. The South Pacific is my favorite place to dive, probably because it is so different from the Caribbean. The tunicates and nudibranchs are so colorful, crinoids grow on sea fans and the clown triggerfish is the most spectacular fish I have ever seen.

These Lindblad/National Geographic trips are perfect for me as they combine scuba diving in remote locations with interesting land excursions – meeting some of the tribes in Papua New Guinea, exploring Pitcairn Island, learning that all the nutmegs in the world came from the Banda Islands and watching the natives perform the nutmeg dance – accompanied by Nat. Geo. Scientists who give information-packed lectures on sea days and in the evenings.

It was not until 2017 that I discovered the Scuba Sports Club of Westchester. This has opened up vast new oceans of diving possibilities and a great source of new friends. Diving the blue hole with the Club in Belize last October was possibly one of my greatest achievements. I entered the water with considerable apprehension, but told myself "You have the training. You can do this." Descending to 130ft was not difficult. As I saw the stalactites, the photographer motioned me to swim around them. I dutifully obeyed, then looked at my computer – 135ft and 4 minutes remaining at this depth. Time for a carefully-controlled ascent. I kept my eyes fixed on my computer for the entire ascent, so careful was I not to exceed an ascent rate of one ft per two seconds. The whole dive lasted 30 minutes, but I felt a tremendous exhilaration at having done this.

In addition to AOW I now have Peak Performance Buoyancy and Enriched Air Nitrox certifications to my credit. These tools have equipped me to enjoy diving in many different locations and I am looking forward to several more years of spectacular diving.

Amanda Slattery - Program Director



## Meet Your Directors!

Gene Miceli, Director At Large



I attended the wedding of my younger sister in the Dominican Republic back in 2011 and change of plans brought me to the world of scuba diving, which I never imagined would result.

During this weeklong vacation at a resort in the DR I had scheduled plans for an off-shore fishing charter including several family and friends who were attending the wedding. As often happens with large group planning, many decided in the 11th hour they were going to skip the trip. As I watched the plans crumble around me, I realized I had nearly a full day at the resort with little planned. As I walked with my very young children to occupy some time, I found staff from the dive center sitting around the pool with scuba gear and tanks at the ready. I learned they were on hand for any guests who would be interested in a free trial to discover scuba. This got my attention and my scuba journey began!

Quickly realizing how calming it was to blow bubbles underwater, I raced into a dive shop back in Mamaroneck upon my return. I was now off and running with the interests of completing my open water, advanced, rescue and various specialties. I assumed this certification was simply to be a permission slip to dive when I found downtime on vacation. Never did I think that my vacations would be oriented around scuba and several weekends a year would include diving in low visibility locations in the northeast.

Fast forward more than ten years and this downtime activity has quickly become the primary activity in my life. I found the TSSC club a few years into this journey, and that only strengthened the interests as I met new friends, joined more dive trips and began to connect my family into the fun. Just this past year, my wife Melissa decided to make the splash and is now both open water and advanced certified. I suspect this journey that started with a change of plans will be a part of me and my family for many more years to come. Those two young children at the time are teenagers now and following us into fantastic underwater world as expected!



## Meet Your Directors!

Kenny Salstrom, Executive Director



I was certified in 1974 at Cougar Sports in the Bronx but did not dive much until 1988. I went to BTS in March 1988 and discovered TSSC. I went to the April meeting and dove with Soliman Shenouda on Memorial Day weekend at the TSSC Regatta. At that time TSSC dove every weekend from Memorial Day weekend until September with the occasional Wednesday night dive. My first night dive was in Long Island Sound at Huckleberry Island when I dove with Len Douglas and came back with a lobster. I dove almost every weekend in NJ in NY. I have also dived CT, MA, RI, and NH. My favorite diving is local. It's cold, murky, and deep but it's home, and I was able to dive whenever I wanted to. The water temp was usually in the 60's but could go as low as the mid-thirties. All my diving at that time was done wearing a ¼" wet suit, hood, and gloves. Now, on warm water dive trips I'm wearing a bathing suit and t-shirt while others are wearing wet suits.

Back in the days when we went diving every weekend, we paired new members with a more experienced diver who would help them and keep an eye on them, and guide them. As I became an experienced Northeast diver, I helped new divers also.

My original certification was with NASDS. After about 200 dives (mostly in the Northeast) I earned my PADI AOW. Since then, I have also been Nitrox and Rescue certified, as well as taken Medic First Aid, CPR, O2, and AED classes several times.

I've been into photography for many years. I started underwater photography with a Nikonos II, graduated to a housed Nikon 8008s, and now shoot with an Olympus digital camera. Due to the camera gear, dive computers, laptop, chargers, etc. my carry on is always very heavy.

My favorite dive trips are where we tour the land sites first, and then spend a week on a liveaboard. With a land-based trip by the time you do your dives and clean up, there simply is not enough of the day left to see the surrounding areas. If you are on a liveaboard without a stay in the country either before or after the diving, you don't see anything of the country. In 1993 we spent a week and a half touring Belize and we were all over the country! There is a lot to see there. We were then on Wave Dancer for a week. I had similar trips to Egypt.

I have been Dive Coordinator, Director at Large, Membership Director, Vice President, President, Past President, Executive Director, Social Director, and probably a few other positions which I have forgotten about!



## Meet Your Directors!

Kenny Salstrom, Executive Director



I was elected Diver of the Year in 1997 and I was humbled by the comments written about me.

### **From the March 1997 Sea Swells**

All Hail Kenny Salstrom – TSSC Diver of the Year!  
By Rick D'Amico

Ken Salstrom joined TSSC eight years ago and has become a mainstay of our club activities. For three years he served as our membership Director, a challenging position. He was Director at large in 1993, and followed that up by becoming Vice President in 1994 and President in 1995.

Although I usually write the Member-of-the-month column, this month I'll present excerpts from the letters of nomination for Kenny as Diver of the Year.

### **Supports Safe Diving with the Club**

"... About one half of his 250 logged dives are in northeast waters, and he currently averages about 30 a year. Kenny feels strongly about perpetuating the buddy system within the club and buddies up with new divers/members when needed. He will even go as far as to leave his camera behind when necessary."

"During club trips such as those to Belize, Cozumel, and the Red Sea, we've seen Kenny taking the time to help others with their equipment when they needed assistance ... Kenny has also acted as a coordinator for local dives, taking the extra step to know who is going on the dive and making sure their skill level is up to the dive ratings- or once again buddying up with someone who might need assistance."

"To advance his own skills and to be able to help others, Kenny has also recently become certified in AOW, Rescue, Oxygen, and Marine Awareness."

I would add to this that Kenny has been a member of the Power Squadron, which does an excellent job of promoting safe boating. Safety on the water's surface is an important, but all-too-often neglected element of diving safety.

### **Service to the Community**

"... his underwater photographs have been exhibited in TSSC's exhibit at the Commerce Building in Manhattan in 1994 and 1995, as well as in the Mount Vernon and Mount Kisco libraries."

"Kenny has written many articles for the Sea Swells during his 8+ years with the club on subjects ranging from diving safety, to trip reports, and some of the gallows humor that is his trademark."

"Also of importance to the Dive Community is Kenny's work with Beneath The Sea as co-chairman of the photo contest ... Kenny also has put a considerable amount of time into running the TSSC booth and BTS over the years, as well as helping with AV, Ocean Pals, and in 1996 photographing the show."

Well done, congratulations Kenny,

Rick D'Amico



## Meet Your Directors!

Ken Andreu, Newsletter Editor

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Once upon a time, I decided it would be fun to learn how to SCUBA dive. It started when I was born ..... an AQUARIUS.

I grew up on 1960's TV's "Sea Hunt" with Lloyd Bridges (Dad let me stay up late on Friday nights), reading "Sea Devils" DC comics and later watching all the Jacques Ives Cousteau TV Specials. My friend Bobby and I would skin dive in the Kensico reservoir on hot summer days. Snorkeling to the middle of the Reservoir.....try that today without getting arrested!

We knew nothing about Yoga but we taught ourselves to oxygenate our blood so we could stay longer underwater, without passing out (which of course was a challenge).

We would explore the islands and look for any remains of the sunken town of Kensico on our swimming explorations. We followed the old roads on the surface as they continued underwater to the old town's remains. This was in the early days of rural farms to suburban development, before NYCDEP Watershed security became an issue.

We introduced ourselves to the Kensico water community of perch, sunfish, crayfish, pickerel, trout and frolicking baby boomers.

Rope swings into the water were varied, communal and often quite creative. The ropes would be tied to high tree limbs with tree mounted platforms or cliffs to launch from. Teenage gymnastics were the order of the day.

Flips, twirls, multiple swingers, summersaults and cannonballs were all part of the show. We watched out for each other and nobody got hurt..... too badly. Just the standard scratches, scrapes and small cuts.

I would tell my mother that we were going swimming in "The Res". She would respond, " Fine, don't be late for dinner." It was a different world.

In the late 60s, I joined my High School swim team. Essential subscription to "Skin Diver" magazine for years and, of course, joined the Cousteau Society. I learned about environmental issues,



## Meet Your Directors!

Ken Andreu, Newsletter Editor

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endangered species and underwater living habitats.

We went adolescently crazy over Ian Fleming's James Bond "Thunderball" and a short-lived TV series called "Malibu Run".

Marine Biology and Oceanography were prerequisite interests.

Got my first Open Water certification in college in 1973, before all the certifying alphabet agencies took hold. Open Water Dives were in Otsego and Skaneateles Lakes. Picked up my Life Guard certification along the way and the foundational First Aid, CPR, AED, etc. Upon graduation from college, my father gifted me SCUBA gear.....regulator, tank and backpack.

The investment was worth it as I paid him back by working under his boats, in and out of the water. I would get my equipment checked and tanks charged at Cougar Sports (for those that remember it).

On our sailing excursions, I would dive in various New England locales....Block Island, Narragansett Bay and Cape Cod to name a few.

Watched the whale migrations and walked a .22 cal wounded Sand Shark through the surf off the Cape till it swam away on its own.

I never saw Spielberg's "Jaws" till it came out on VHS, so I never picked up the shark hysteria. Dived John Pennekamp and the Keys in the late 70's when it was new, vital and pristine.

In the mid 80's, dove the West Coast of Mexico with breaching whales, surface swimming sea snakes and anglerfish sitting on the bottom.

After that, the tasks of job, family and more pressing issues took precedence over diving.

Years later, while abroad, I hooked up with a local SDI dive school and got my first official alphabet dive certification.

Since then I have picked up some PADI certs, as well.....but I still consider myself a novice to the modern permutations.

I joined TSSC in 2018 to connect with other local divers.....and my only regret is that I didn't do it sooner.



## Meet Your Directors!

Gary Lehman, Newsletter Publisher

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Like many others of my generation, I was captivated in the late 60's and 70's with the television shows *Sea Hunt*, *Flipper*, *Voyage To The Bottom Of The Sea* (with Richard Basehart ! – I don't know why I remember that...perhaps a prototype of James T. Kirk of the Starship *Enterprise*!) and of course, *The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau*. And the US space program... Mercury, Gemini and Apollo.

I was also energized by the emerging environmental advocacy of the times; my Bar Mitzvah speech in 1969 was about the evils of pesticides like DDT and the urgent need to protect raptors and other species. I was inspired after reading Rachael Carson's classic and transformational book *Silent Spring*. I remember the first Earth Day, in 1970 (I had the green Ecology logo sewed on my Boy Scout uniform right shoulder. My troop leadership permitted it, even though it was unauthorized!)

I started diving late in life, in 2007 when I was already 51 years old. I was on vacation with friends in Panama, and they were diving and invited me to join. I advised I was not certified. On their suggestion I took the resort course and learned just enough to get by. They were watching me like a hawk while diving, but I was comfortable in the water already via snorkeling and having done the open-water one-mile swim several times in the Boy Scouts. I took to diving pretty easily -- and thought it incredibly cool! (That said, I am a total firm believer that one's experience dictates diving expertise, and not the "C" card. And in that department, I am sorely underserved due to lack of consistent diving.)

I joined the Club in 2008. Life's circumstances however were (and still are) such that I have not been able to dive nearly as much as I would like. I have been working since I was 15 years old. Golf caddy at Winged Foot, paper route for Mamaroneck Daily Times, and short-order cook at Harbor Island in Mamaroneck. Pretty much steady work, work, work... then 36 years at IBM in a variety of positions. My discretionary and sorely limited vacation time (and oh yea, money) has to be shared with my wife (who is not a diver, not a beach person); three daughters; their colleges, grad schools and weddings; six grandchildren; mountaineering & friends associated with that activity (Mt. Elbrus in Russia, Pikes Peak in Colorado – twice, Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, and in 2018 Mt. Everest Base Camp in Nepal). (These were all cancer fundraisers and I again thank the Club for the donation from our 2018 50/50 for the Mt. Everest Base Camp trek!)

2022 is again not looking too promising for me from a diving point of view; two weeks are already allocated for my cousin's daughter's wedding in Scotland, combined with trip to Azores; and our 40th anniversary trip to Central Asia for three weeks (dependent on political conditions and worldwide status of Covid of course). However, in July I hope to do some easy dives with our TSSC team in Lake Champlain – a stone's throw from my current residence near Burlington, Vermont.



## Meet Your Directors!

Gary Lehman, Newsletter Publisher

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Our Club elected me Diver of the Year in 2015, and I was humbled by this honor. I display my breaching humpback whale award proudly in my home. Reasons cited centered around my support of our Club's 40th anniversary — truly a milestone achievement these days!

My favorite diving experiences! Some of the best memories are topside, and on the liveaboard in Egypt and Bahamas! Diving with seals in Galapagos (they are like naughty teenage boys!); diving with seals off Gloucester; having a seal tug of war - with my fin in the middle; I vividly remember the first time seeing sharks in the water and realizing for myself that what everyone was saying was absolutely right – they had utterly zero interest in me as a human; that said, another memory was where a small bull shark showed undue interest in me (I didn't realize that I was slightly bleeding from having scraped my arm on coral in the Galapagos); seeing an incredibly majestic manta ray underwater off Puerto Vallarta; encountering a submarine-like whale shark up close and personal in Djibouti, Africa - watching its eye looking me over; playing with dolphins 50' down at Anthony's Key Resort Roatan; recognizing a spectacularly-well camouflaged stonefish by the symmetric placement of two eyes... ;

Marveling at the photography of our friends Olga Torrey and Larry Cohen; attending Sea Stories at the Explorers Club; meeting Phillip Brashear (son of Carl Brashear) (remember the film *Men of Honor* with Cuba Gooding?) for my *Sea Swells* interview; being there for Newton Underwater Search and Rescue in January 2013 following the Newtown Ct. Sandy Hook massacre (see the story in this issue); getting an in-depth tour of Deep Dive Dubai (look for that story in this issue, too!) ;

and other non-diving experiences too, such as touring the Egyptian Museum in Cairo with TSSC; meeting and interviewing so many brilliant luminaries in this sport...joking around with Stan Waterman who filmed *Blue Water, White Death*; interviewing Brett Gilliam, Zig and Joanne, taking pictures of David Doubilet and Jennifer Hayes, chatting with 'Her Deepness' Dr. Sylvia Earle, also with 'The Shark Lady' Dr. Eugenie Clark and Valerie Taylor and with legends like our own Vreni Roduner and Glenn Butler, and -- wow, could I ever go on and on! I hesitate to mention any more people in particular, because I will no doubt inadvertently leave out transformational individuals who have contributed greatly to the sport we all love!

To my friends at TSSC I say "keep on, keeping on". Keep diving, keep learning, keep training, keep practicing, keep mentoring those coming along with you and after you, keep enjoying, keep exploring, and most of all and most importantly -- keep safe.

Warmly, and with admiration,  
Gary



## Meet Your Directors!

J-U-D-Y K, Environment and Legislative

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In grade school my nickname was ‘water woman’, because I used to swim a lot and water the plants and grass, and I enjoyed hosing down the sidewalks! In high school, I became an avid reader and environmentalist activist Greenpeace supporter. My connection to the Greenpeace organization and movement imprinted on me the importance of putting yourself on the line for causes you support. I have been an environmental lobbyist and humane animal activist for decades now.

An acquaintance dared me to try scuba diving in 1997; and that’s the year I got my Open Water training from instructors Lou & Leeza Hernandez! They introduced me to the world of underwater traveling and enjoying the feeling of being with other divers from all over the world. They suggested that I join the TSSC group. They also enjoined me to buy them a drink every time I shined a dive light in their eyes on night dives, and affectionately encourage me to stop using my arms to “swim”! I learned a lot from these pokes! I also learned quickly to save my money for dive trips, and not buy drinks because I screwed up! (Meanwhile, the person who dared me hasn’t even completed more than a handful of dives and stopped at their open water dives – I’m just rubbing it in!) But it was such a wonderful challenge, because in time this would lead me to participate in and eventually provide leadership for ‘citizen scientist’ trips tagging sharks, conducting fish population census, listening/categorizing whale vocalizations (i.e. SONGS!), and locating turtles for researchers and environmental groups to protect.

A few hundred dives later, my next instructor Bradley Gaiser taught me rescue skills, and suggested I continue my learning - and teach others. I began the dive master program, but life happened, and I choose not to complete it. At that time, I was dedicated to being on the Dive Team at Norwalk Aquarium at least two full days each week. For more than a decade, it was a pleasure for me to educate thousands of people about the importance of the ocean, sharks and why conservation is so important. And I got to be with amazing animals, dive in a well-cared for tank with so many interesting and committed environmentalists and divers.



## Meet Your Directors!

J-U-D-Y K, Environment and Legislative

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It was there where I meet my next scuba diving influencer. Tim Thomas was the Dive Safety Officer and Cave Diving Instructor who assisted me with dry suit skills. He also got me intrigued about cave diving. So, off to Mexico I went to meet NACD Instructor Kim Davidson, who put me into the correct mindset to learn cavern and 'intro to cave diving' -- but most importantly to always be prepared for the "what ifs" of cave diving. He always threw a curve ball into our dives – just to develop and advance my diving situational awareness and practice correct responses to unexpected circumstances. Caves are totally different environments that can have various situations and different currents than open water - or even wreck diving. So, when cave diving -- if you see the 'grim reaper' sign post warning of dangerous conditions – STOP-- do not enter that space if you are not fully trained, practiced and confident – too many people die each year thinking it's the same skill set. I can tell you it's not.

Furthermore, it is NOT OK to allow your CPR, O2 or AED training for adults or kids lapse. I've taken a bunch of specialty classes and trained with some amazing instructors, learned from great divers, and watched people do outright dangerous things underwater being over tasked or simply careless. I always try to think and learn how I can dive better, and I ask others and want people to give me suggestions as well. Much of skill set was learned from each other, by some new tips or even things not to do. I've learned the most important thing for me is to enjoy the feeling of being in the underwater world in real time without a camera.

With a fellow member of the club, I took classes to become a buddy diver to assist with handicapped divers. It was truly a surreal experience to practice; as if I was the handicapped person or paraplegic, who needed to have someone as a buddy doing everything for me. Think about how you would tell someone you needed to slow down ascent because you had ear issues, or you needed to stop as you were dizzy or just needed more air flow. It made everyone in the course realize the difficulties handicapped people of all kinds and situations must face each day. But even more so, how dependent on YOU, as their buddy they are at every moment; which is why every handicapped diver needs two fully trained handicapped buddies. Their is so much thinking that must go into understanding someone's abilities and the things that you need to do for them underwater. However, seeing the weightlessness of handicapped individuals which include PTSD survivors being in the water is such a liberating event for them! I wanted to help bring that experience and joy to more people; plus I obviously enjoy being in the water. But the level of on-going training, the lack of any structured programs in Westchester or Putnam; along with no suitable pools at the current time put an end to this training. But I remain on the lookout for future opportunities or programs that might teach me how to bring the joys of diving to our handicapped friends and neighbors.



## Meet Your Directors!

J-U-D-Y K, Environment and Legislative

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Scuba diving has introduced me to so many amazing people from Westchester County -- and all over the world. Being in the water is unique, experiencing it is awe inspiring. We must protect our marine environments with great and growing urgency. As a Senior Humane Policy Volunteer Leader for the Humane Society of the United States, I've been working to get local, state, federal and international waterways increased protection. It seems like an uphill battle as there is much to be done, and the human activity and commercial tide is too frequently against our oceans here and overseas. However, our lives and those who follow us depend on us doing our utmost to saving our oceans as well.

I look to divers – who have marveled at the underwater treasures - as those who hope to play in this environment and pass it on to the next generations. We need to love something to protect it. I'm inviting all of us to consider working with me to make a call to their politician on issues which matter. One cause which I have been involved with for years has been elimination of shark finning. A few of our NYS House of Representatives have not sponsored a proposed bill that stops trafficking of shark fins. This boggles my mind... we as a diving community marvel and cherish seeing sharks underwater, and we know this indicates a healthier ecosystem! We have to ask ourselves -- did we stand up for the sharks we were privileged to watch underwater? I'm not looking to trigger political fights with folks, but I remain committed to protect what we all love about diving – and for that matter breathing! I seek every opportunity to contact our policy makers and ask for their support with specific proposals. If anyone is willing to make a phone call here and there, please let me know, and I will send you the information and a script of what to say -- and we can also fully discuss it. We all need to do our part to stop the oceanic plastics and garbage patches from growing, protect endangered species, give wildlife the spaces they need to live and share our environments -- so that our terrestrial and marine species can survive in the future!

If anyone wants to get involved with helping to get proposals passed drop me a note. If you have an idea of an environmental learning event or suggestion, please bring it up to me or another Director.

Safe Diving to all!

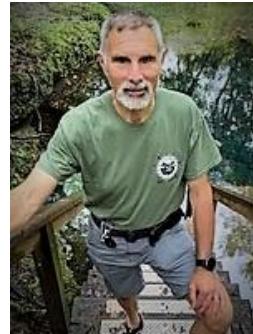
Judy



## Meet Your Directors!

Joe Rinaldi, Safety and Education

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Growing up near Long Island Sound, I was always interested in aquatic activities, so it was no surprise that I first became certified to scuba dive through the YMCA program in 1977, while I was still in High School. While I was very excited about scuba diving, other priorities like working my way through college; starting a career and purchasing/fixing up a home prevented me from doing much diving for many years. Then a little over twenty years ago, after these responsibilities were resolved, I decided it was time to get back to my scuba diving hobby.

After having been away from scuba for so long, I felt it would be wise to start by taking a scuba class. To my delight I soon found that the same skills I had learned years before in high school were still being used and that I had not completely forgotten how to apply those skills. The major difference in scuba diving that I noticed was that scuba gear had made some dramatic improvements. Wetsuits were much more comfortable; Buoyancy Compensators had moved from orally inflated chest mount to low pressure inflated jacket or back mount and Submersible Pressure Gauges (SPG's) had removed the need for "J" valves.

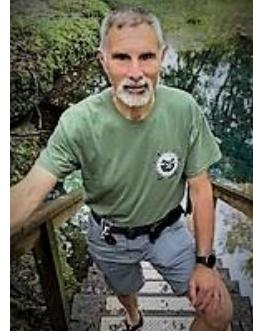
As I gradually updated my scuba gear, I continued to work on my scuba skills by taking a variety of courses. Given my love of history, I developed a passion for wreck diving.





## Meet Your Directors!

Joe Rinaldi, Safety and Education



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I find the stories behind shipwrecks to be fascinating, and I love researching the details behind a wreck like: where it was built; how long it was sailing and what where the circumstances the caused it to become a ship wreck. My interest in wreck diving also lead me to a number of other scuba specialties like: deep diving (as many wrecks are deeper than 60 FSW); drysuit diving (as the best preserved wrecks are found in cold water) and Technical diving (as I wanted to see some wrecks that are beyond recreational scuba diving limits). Along the way I also decided to challenge myself by becoming a Dive Master and eventually a Scuba Instructor. I firmly believe that a good diver is always learning, so a few years ago I made the personal goal to become a Cave diver.

While there were difficult aspects to every training I undertook, my journey to become a Cave Diver challenged my scuba diving skills more than I could have ever imagined. Cave diving is one of the most difficult type of diving as the environment in a cave can completely change in an instant, leaving divers no clear way back to the surface. However, underwater caves also possess a beauty that I could never have dreamed of. In addition, I have found that the buoyancy and fin kicking skills necessary to safely cave dive apply very nicely to just about every other type of scuba diving that I current do.

Over the past few years, I have also developed an interest in traveling to scuba dive in different locations around the world. This interest led me to join The Scuba Sports Club (TSSC), where I have made many new friends who share a common interest in scuba diving. Hopefully, I will be able to keep scuba diving for many more years and make many more new friends that have a similar interest in the joys that scuba diving has to offer.



## Meet Your Directors!

Liza Handziak, Social Director

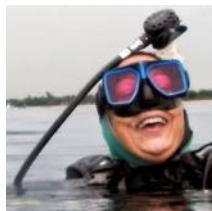


Ever since I learned to swim (thank you YMCA,) I found every opportunity to be in the water. Whether it was lakes, streams, rivers, hotel pools, I always found it was a great way to explore our world.

When on a snorkeling excursion on a wreck in Aruba, instead of being immersed by a great abundance of fish, I was surrounded by a bunch of bubbles from the divers below. I thought right then that I wanted to be down there. Instead of watching a bunch of divers, I wanted to be one. The following year in the Cayman Islands, our hotel offered a resort course for diving. It was a shore dive on a wreck right off the dive shop pier. I knew that this is where I wanted to be. After taking several resort courses it never occurred to me that you can get certified and be able to go out on your own. Like many of us, I got certified as an open water diver at Dutch Springs and continued from there with several other certifications.

Diving has opened a whole new world to me. I got to explore the wrecks in The Thousand Islands, North Carolina, Truk Lagoon and off the Jersey shore. I got to see the beautiful reefs of the Caribbean and the Red Sea. Even on land, through TSSC, I was able to make new friends who share the same love for diving. It also gave me the opportunity to become a volunteer as a dive team member at The New York City Aquarium where hopefully it will inspire a new generation of curiosity and love for our oceans. 70% of earth is water and I am humbled and grateful to be able to see even a very small part of it.

Happy New Year!



## Club Dive Trips — Dive Planning Calendar for 2022

***What's on the radar !***

**Jack Ricotta, Dive Planner**



If you have ideas for upcoming trips please let Jack know !!

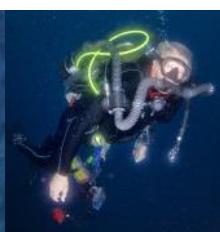
### **Upcoming trips**

January 20-24 Cozumel

April 23-30 Dominica

May 13-29 Egypt

July — Roatan details to be announced





## The End of an Era – Dutch Springs to Close

Nick Lappano



In late August 2021, the northeast diving community was stunned by the news that an agreement had been made to sell Dutch Springs to real estate developer Trammell Crow. The announced plan would include the construction of two large warehouses on the property. The lake itself would be fenced off and no longer available for diving.

Although efforts are still ongoing at this time to avoid the loss of this diving mecca, hope is fading that it will be saved for use by the general diving community.

The closure of Dutch Springs will have a major impact on northeast diving. Not only will we be losing a major diving and training venue, but the social diving community will be decimated. Over the 41 years of operation, Dutch has been ‘the place to go’ to meet other divers. We would dive, share stories, and exchange information. Let us not forget the midday BBQ’s and evening meals together.

I was introduced to Dutch in October 2004 when I went there with a group of other Open Water dive students to complete my open water training dives. Those four dives eventually grew in number to over 250 dives which I have made at Dutch Springs. Over the next few years I would occasionally go to Dutch to make a dive or two. In 2010 I completed my rescue diver training at Dutch Springs as well.

I really got serious about diving at the “Quarribean” when I got a season pass for the 2011 season. I got a tent to take full advantage of the pass and would frequently go out on Saturday and camp overnight into Sunday. This is when I really started to meet new dive buddies. I became familiar with the various underwater attractions and how to reach them. I cannot even begin to estimate how many times I followed the line to the east platforms and to the school bus before navigating my way to other subsurface attractions.

The water temperatures and conditions varied widely throughout a dive season.!

Despite the fact that the surface temperatures would increase significantly throughout the year, the thermoclines always lurked as you descended, ready to take your breath away. Below sixty feet the water temp would never be higher than the upper forties. (low forties in April and early May.)

Early in the season, when Dutch opened in April, the surface water temperature would be a brisk forty degrees Fahrenheit. However, the cool water discouraged algae growth so the visibility could be over fifty feet! We even made a few dives in February when the surface water temperature was in the mid-thirties. Despite the fact that all *sane* divers were in drysuits, I would dive in a wetsuit.



## The End of an Era – Dutch Springs to Close

Nick Lappano



As the season progressed, the surface water temperatures would rise up to the upper 70's by the end of August. This was however, a mixed blessing as the warmer water also supercharged the algae bloom. As a result, by that time in the season, the overall visibility would drop significantly. Often the average viz would be ten to fifteen feet, with some areas having less than six feet of visibility. As it warmed up the Saturday night dives would also become popular until the visibility dropped off which reduced their appeal somewhat. Many divers would switch over to wetsuits for these warmer conditions.

Usually, by mid-September, the water would start to cool off just a little, and the visibility would slowly improve. One of the best times to dive would, in fact, be that time of year since the air temperatures would still be high enough to warm up between dives – which were, in any event, not debilitatingly cold!

It would quickly start to cool down; the sun would be lower in the Southern sky and divers would again be in drysuits. Although the water was still relatively warm, it was still cool enough to give you a slight chill, and the surface conditions made it hard to warm up between dives. By the time the season wrapped up in early November, only the hardest of divers would show up.

Dutch Springs offered divers a venue to keep their skills current or improve them and provided a convenient location for dive shops from the entire northeast and mid-Atlantic region to complete diver training activities. However, what I will miss most is the regular opportunity to meet up with new and old friends.

Goodbye, Dutch.... Thanks for the memories...





## Requiem for Dutch Springs

Post script by Gary Lehman



As Nick notes in his article, the prospect of the closure of Dutch Springs is not yet a sure thing. There are still township hearings scheduled. The Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corp also has input into future plans. Alternative use scenarios are evidently under consideration, which may create an opportunity for parts of Dutch Springs to be available in the future for divers. The total area is 95 acres, and the quarry itself is 50 acres. So, the bottom line is that there may be some salvaging of a small section of the facility for divers associated with a dive club, likely at substantially higher cost. Time alone will tell. If you wish to follow this more closely, let your Sea Swells staff know, and we can direct you to individuals who are closely following every twist and turn of this ongoing situation. Several other dive sites are under review for use by our community.

I cannot let this opportunity go by without mentioning the fish at Dutch. Yes, there were fish. And they were aggressive. Some of them would intercept us during training missions. This is because divers would feed them worms dug up from under the surface. There were perch, palomino trout, bass, and bull sharks (just kidding about the bull sharks!).

I am also eternally grateful to Nick for my annual unofficial recertification dives at Dutch, when Nick would dive with me and counsel me on various techniques and corrections. We trained together for me to get practice deploying a surface marker buoy – which can be tricky and takes practice. Thanks again, Nick! I will also always remember the dream-like vision of the 'stairway to heaven' deep under the surface at the deeper end of Dutch. And the call of "Pizza Pizza" instead of "Help" during our PADI Rescue-diver training dives (to avoid alarming the ever-vigilant lifeguard staff!).

Many dive clubs held weekend retreats to Dutch, arriving from all over the region. One group, the New York Underwater Photography Society, conducted underwater photography sessions to new and aspiring underwater photographers. Hats off to Larry Cohen, Olga Torrey, Michael Rothschild, among others, for lending their prodigious underwater photography skills to help newer divers achieve personal best in underwater photography. And another area club, the NYC Sea Gypsies, would conduct annual "Intro to Northeast Diving" training sessions to skill-build for the somewhat more challenging conditions involved with northeast diving than warm blue water destinations.

***Finally, Dutch Springs played a critical role in training for public safety divers. Loss of Dutch will negatively impact public safety diver training – where divers trained in rescue, recovery, night navigation, teaming, incident management and response, communications and other exercises. It will be challenging to replace Dutch for these training activities.***



## Sandy Hook Elementary School Memorial Dive at Dutch Springs, PA. 1/19/13

Gary Lehman...(Appeared in February 2013)



Marty Folan, Nick Lappano and I from The Scuba Sports Club attended the Memorial Dive for Sandy Hook Elementary School at Dutch Springs in Bethlehem, PA on January 19th. The Candlelight Vigil Dive was organized by Connecticut's Newtown Underwater Search and Rescue (NUSAR). While NUSAR itself was not dispatched to the site of the atrocity, many of NUSAR's staff are also firemen and ambulance corps EMTs, and they were at the school that day because NUSAR's building is virtually adjacent to the Sandy Hook Elementary School.

All of the proceeds of the Memorial Dive were donated to the Sandy Hook Support Fund to benefit the families of the children and teachers murdered at Sandy Hook Elementary School on 12-14-2012. Dutch Springs' owner honorably offered the whole facility to NUSAR for the event. Many local food vendors and local and national dive gear manufacturers and service providers contributed products and services for a raffle. NUSAR, as well as everyone who participated in the day's Memorial Dive, was grateful for this outpouring of support from all of the event sponsors. After a horror like this, knowing that your peers in the dive community-at-large have your back, and are your 'virtual buddies' providing support and solidarity is greatly comforting. Comfort and solace has been in terribly great demand by too many people – including the first responders.

Event Coordinator and NUSAR diver Jeremy Stein began the Memorial Dive with an invocation and then led those assembled in a moment of silent reflection and prayer. While the event had many laughs and good times (and some great pizza and BBQ courtesy of some local restaurants), the underlying reason for the Memorial Dive was never far from the surface - honoring the memory of the victims of the Sandy Hook Elementary School (SHES) shooting and raising funds for the Sandy Hook School Support Fund in support of the victims' families and first responders.

Earlier in the morning before the 11AM Candlelight Vigil Dive kickoff, NUSAR Team Captain Brian Solt and NUSAR team members Hans Williams and George Robinson headed into the water to install a memorial plaque on the familiar submerged bus in Dutch Springs. The plaque reads "In memory of the victims of Sandy Hook Elementary School. Our hearts are broken but our hope is unbreakable". Connecticut is the Sandy Hook Memorial Dive background for the graphic, including a heart symbol at the geographic location of Newtown, CT. The plaque was designed by Jeremy Stein and John Almstead (also of NUSAR), and their design is forever powerful, direct and compelling. The graphics art company Concepts and Design of Connecticut made the plaque itself.

The Candlelight Vigil Dive profile for the day was simple and meaningful - a processional of 26 divers (representing the 26 victims of the school shooting), each stopping to review the plaque, their green and white glowsticks serving as candles and representing the colors of SHES. The divers included public safety divers, civilian divers, and Search and Rescue personnel from a wide area from Connecticut to Virginia. Northeast Search and Rescue provided surface support for divers entering and exiting the water. For everyone who will dive on the bus in the future, please take a moment while you are down there to remember the children and teachers and their families - and also remember the first responders who were at that horrific scene, and the first responders' teammates, as well.



## Sandy Hook Elementary School Memorial Dive at Dutch Springs, PA. 1/19/13



Why was Dutch Spring selected for the Memorial Dive? Jeremy Stein explains: "We wanted to create a permanent memorial to honor the victims and the first responders involved on that tragic day. This is our way of supporting the town that has done so much to support us." Stein added that Dutch Springs provided an ideal place to create a permanent memorial with access for millions of people. A combination of the central location, the size of the facility and the clarity of the water, not to mention the school bus that seemed like a perfect medium, made Dutch Springs the perfect place. Dutch Springs is near and dear to all Northeast divers' hearts; and many of us earned our open water and advanced certifications while diving there. The water is clear and 'cool' (in a literal sense at times... on Saturday the surface Temperature was approximately 50F and closer to 45F at the bus).

NUSAR also selected Dutch Springs because of the bond we all have with the site, and the bond that all divers share. All emergency services team members share a bond; maybe it is similar to the 'band of brothers' combat infantry or submariners' bond. All search and rescue teams who train at Dutch Springs from this point forward will see the plaque, and will remember not only the victims and their shattered families, but will also remember and honor the Emergency Services first responders who have come before them to this spot.

NOTHING could POSSIBLY have prepared even the most experienced and hardened veterans for the atrocity at Sandy Hook. And the agony of the day affected not only the first responders who were on site at the school - but also their fire department, ambulance corps and NUSAR team mates - some of whom heard the horror unfolding in real time over the extended radio network, and heard the parents' screams. The abject devastation of not being able to help or change the outcome at all was for many of the team the most shattering experience of all.

Perhaps this dive and the memorial itself was a way for NUSAR and other first responders to "do something" and to feel a little less helpless, if only for the day. Stein explained that this memorial dive was a way to come together as a community to create something beautiful and moving. Having met some of them, it is certain that all of these first responders would have laid down their lives to save these children and teachers, but they were powerless to do so in this situation. Every generation has members who are 'the greatest generation'. The Emergency Services men and women divers at Dutch Springs this day were among them. And it is good that future first responders and SAR teams will see that plaque on that bus during their training, and they will know that the diving community came together as a family to support one another, honoring the victims and the first responders of the SHES shooting.



## Sandy Hook Elementary School Memorial Dive at Dutch Springs, PA. 1/19/13



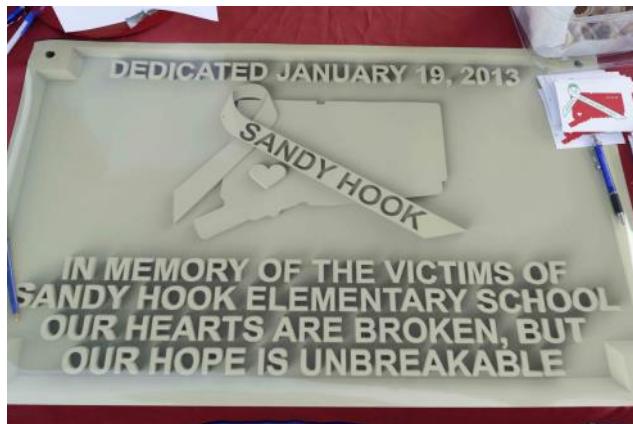
NUSAR team captain Brian Solt comments "...The day was a step in the long process toward healing and recovery for the town, and we certainly could not have made it a successful day without the tremendous support from Dutch Springs, the many public safety drivers and companies in attendance, as well as the many vendors and volunteers who donated their time or food and dive equipment to the cause..." May Providence provide some peace and solace for the families of the murdered children and teachers, and for the emergency workers/EMTs who were there - and their team mates, too.

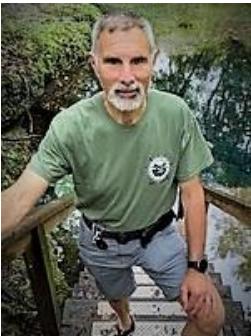
Gary Lehman, January 2013

To view a video of the proceedings at Dutch Springs that day,

Sandy Hook Memorial Dive by Newtown Search and Rescue, at Dutch Springs Pennsylvania on Vimeo click the blue link...

<https://vimeo.com/94118285>





# Boston Sea Rovers 2021 Show

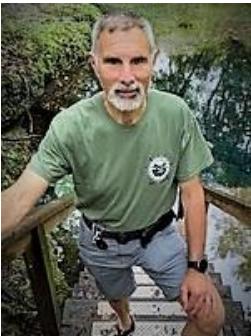


Joe Rinaldi  
TSSC Safety/Education Director

In early October I was lucky enough to attend the Boston Sea Rovers 67th Annual Underwater Clinic in Danvers, MA. The Boston Sea Rovers underwater clinic started in 1954 with the mission “To educate the general public about the underwater world”. The Boston Sea Rovers show format would be recognizable to anyone who has attended the Beneath the Sea Consumer Ocean Exposition, Scuba & Dive Travel Show. This year’s Boston Sea Rovers Underwater Clinic, began on Friday, October 1st, with dedicated workshops. On Saturday, October 2nd, the Show continued to have dedicated workshops, but also included seminars that were open to all of the shows attendees. In addition on Saturday night there was a film festival that featured some of the amazing videos of the underwater world. On Sunday, October 3rd, the Boston Sea Rovers show wrapped up after another full day of dedicated workshops and seminars.

This years Boston Sea Rovers show seminars were divided into tracks that included: *Public Safety Diving; Photography & Video; Dive Techniques; Shipwrecks & Maritime History & Coral Reef Eco Systems*. The workshops offered at this yeas show were more intensive training that required an additional fee and included topics like: *Discover SCUBA; Underwater Photography techniques; Photo & Video Editing techniques & Underwater lighting techniques*. The Boston Sea Rovers show also includ-ed an exhibit hall (open on Saturday & Sunday) where show participants could see some of the latest equipment offerings from major scuba manufacturers. In addition, there were representatives from major scuba travel destinations and training agen-cies.

One difference that I observed between the Boston Sea Rovers Underwater Clinic & the Beneath The Sea Consumer Ocean Exposition Scuba and Dive Travel Show is the size of the two events. Compared to Beneath the Sea, the Boston Sea Rovers show is much smaller in terms of both exhibitors and attendees. While the smaller size may seem to be a drawback, I personally found it to be a positive factor for me, as I had a much easier time holding a conversation with the representatives of the



# Boston Sea Rovers 2021 Show

Joe Rinaldi

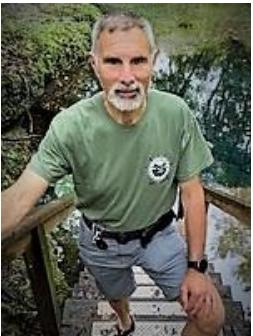


scuba manufacturers that were at the Boston Sea Rovers show. One thing that was definitely not different between the two shows was the quality of the seminars and the amazing videos at the film festival.

The Boston Sea Rovers film festival featured videos on: *The history, ecology & physiology of sharks by Dr. Gregory Skomal*; *Underwater imagery by Joel & Jennifer Penner*; *A recent dive expedition to the wreck of the Lusitania by Rick Simon & Jennifer Sellitti*; *an IMAX video on the Secrets of the Sea by Michelle & Howard Hall & Scuba diving in a remote location in Canada by Michael Labrecque & Julie Ouimet*.

This year's Boston Sea Rovers show was also different from previous Boston Sea Rovers shows in that the date for the show was in October. In the past the Boston Sea Rovers held their annual show in early march to help kick off the dive season. However, the effects of COVID 19 precluded the Boston Sea Rovers from holding their show this Spring. So instead of starting the local scuba diving season, this years show was closer to ending the season. The reality of long term contracts will the venue also require the Boston Sea Rovers to hold their 68th annual underwater clinic next October, instead of the usual Spring date. However, given the excellent seminars, informational workshops and fascinating film festival, I for one have every intention of attending the Boston Sea Rovers next Fall.

Joseph W. Rinaldi  
TSSC Safety/Education



# Boston Sea Rovers 2021 Show

Joe Rinaldi



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## Sea Stories 2021

Kevin Cushing



*Sea Stories* at the Explorers Club returned from a 1-year virtual hiatus to a live event on Saturday, November 13th. It was the first live event hosted at the famed venue since the beginning of the pandemic. All guests were required to be vaccinated.

TSSC members in attendance were Liza Handziak, Kenneth Salstrom, and Kevin Cushing. Former members recognized were Allan Rios and Glen Butler.

*Sea Stories* has been an annual event and features speakers and presentations about the ocean exploration, shipwrecks, conservation and marine life. This year's speakers included five explorers with varied experiences.

Paul Henri Nargeolet presented about his 6 expeditions on the *Titanic*. New and old footage was shown to show the evolution of the famous wreck over the years.

Stephen D. Nagiewicz documented the underwater battlefield on the Mullica River in New Jersey.

Gaelin Rosenwaks spoke about her experiences as a global explorer on topics ranging from ice core drilling in the Bering Sea to her photography of sperm whales.

Heather Knowels and David Caldwell located the wreck of the *Allentown* which was a steamship lost in 1888 off the coast of Salem, Massachusetts.

Bradley Wetherbee discussed how sharks are the most extraordinary explorers.

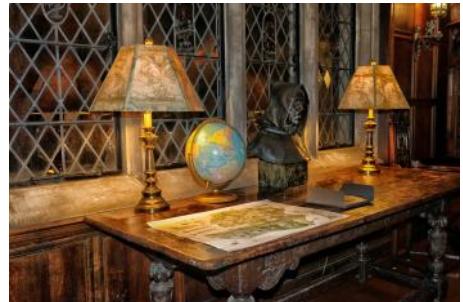
For me, the day itself is the highlight. It starts with a breakfast and general mingling. At 10:00 the presentations begin. Speakers have 45-60 minutes each and between each is a 15-minute coffee break. Lunch is served for an hour and then the presentations continue. After the last speaker and a general wrap up, cocktail hour(s) begins. All of the breaks, lunch, and cocktails provide an opportunity to speak with other guests, presenters, and others in attendance. Having been to five Sea Stories over the years, I can say that the day is well worth it. It's a full day of history, exploration, and inspiration!

The Explorers Club was founded in 1904 and is headquartered in New York City. Chapters exist around the world to support scientific expeditions and unite members in the bonds of good fellowship. Famous members include Teddy Roosevelt, Neil Armstrong, Jane Goodall, Edmund Hillary, John Glenn, Sally Ride, Bob Ballard, and Jill Heinerth. The club moved to its current location at 46 E 70th St in 1965.



## Sea Stories 2021

Kevin Cushing





## TSSC DIVES BELIZE!

Ken Andreu



**Saturday, October 16, 2021**, another '0 Dark 30' flight out of HPN as the TSSC crew formed up and reacquainted themselves. Westchester Airport (HPN) outbound to ATL. The usual lag time in ATL. Finally, the last leg to BZE - Philip S.W. Goldson International Airport.

Oooopppps!

**Rewind to Thursday PM** in White Plains and the Forme Urgent Care on North Broadway. As I was limping in with a protective boot from a recent Achilles tendon repair, I heard a yell. It was Jack, the Dive Planner, escorted by a gent who came to be known as Rick. They were climbing out of a Jeep driven by Stephanie, who gave her usual cheery salutation. We exchanged amenities as I explained to Jack and Rick the attached protective boot history. We then were escorted into a cozy room at the Urgent Care to get our mandatory covid test, enabling us to leave the virus embroiled USA.

While waiting, Rick apprised us of his various exploits during the last covid limited year. The stories were risque, amusing and, as I have discovered, classic Rick.

**Back to arrival at Belize City.....**the bus was loaded with all the gear, and off we went to the Marriott Hotel opposite the Aggressor dock.

As we sat in the Marriott bar lounge, I took an inventory of the TSSC NY crew. There was Kenny, Bob, Sheri, John, Dennis, Mike, Amanda, Judy, Jack, Rick, Charlie, Helen and Rachel. We sat around introducing and learning each other over cocktails, waiting for boarding time.

Bob introduced me to Mike as he knew we were both in aviation. Turns out Mike works at the Federal Aviation Administration at Teterboro Airport (TEB), and he was interested in getting into the teaching side of Aircraft Mechanic Tech.

**On the Boat.....**We were cleared to board the *Aggressor 4*. We sorted ourselves out to our respective staterooms, and I met my roomie Dennis. Dennis and I became comfortable chatting stories of common ground, special ed and the latest in zoom therapy sessions. We went back on deck and met the Oklahoma contingent as they boarded, the two Mikes, Hugh and Ron.

The boat cast off from the dock. While underway we were given a tour, and our first *Aggressor* briefing in the lounge/dining room. We met the Captain, Shea, and crew and were reacquainted with the standard list of do's and don'ts. Dinner and dive gear prep and then to bed.

**The Aggressor 4 Liveaboard.....**In the next six days we accomplished 23 dives as a group and four of our number, John, Judy, Mike Wessinger and Mike Wilhelm - "**The Iron Divers**"- did them all. One of our members had some problems on the first dive



## TSSC DIVES BELIZE!

Ken Andreu



day and surfaced with some breathing issues. As a precaution the Captain steamed through the night to get the member medical care back at Belize City. We were reunited at the end of the trip, but unfortunately the member missed all the dives -- but fortunately had no health issues.

During our reef dives, we were joined by a crew of reef sharks that hung around us waiting for a lionfish tidbit or whatever was available. The reef was well populated by sea turtles, rays, eels, small groupers and friendly nurse sharks. Mike, Jack and Rick speared a fair number of lionfish, and fed the sharks. Unfortunately, Mike got stuck by one of the lionfish. (See Mike's story). Kenny, Bob and Amanda snapped a ton of pix. The Oklahoma crowd did their fair share of diving and keeping the mood serious but enthusiastic.....a great bunch to dive with.

On Wednesday, we dove the Blue Hole. The group descended to a stalactite gallery about 150 feet down. Sheri was particularly enraptured by the dive, having accomplished an anticipated dive benchmark. Everybody took advantage of the deserved photo op!

Meals were always group affairs with the usual story swapping and lighthearted repartee. There was also the late-night trivia game.

**The Return...** Last dives were completed on Friday....Saturday, 23 Oct 21: Bags packed, we walked off the *Aggressor 4*, down the pier for a reunion at the Marriott with our missed member and had uneventful flights home. BEL -> ATL -> HPN.

### **Sunday Dives...**

**Amberhead South (2)**  
**Julies Jungle**

### **Monday Dives...**

**Hat Caye (2)**  
**Quebrada (3)**

### **Tuesday Dives...**

**Uno Coco (2)**  
**HalfMoon Caye Wall (3)**

### **Wednesday Dives...**

**Blue Hole**  
**Cathedral (3)**

### **Thursday Dives...**

**Angelfish Wall (2)**  
**Aquarium (2)**

### **Friday Dives...**

**Sandy Slope (2)**



## TSSC DIVES BELIZE!



© Kenneth Salstrom



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## Sea Swells Catches up with the.....IRON DIVERS IN OUR CLUB !!

Yes, it is true, we have some real heroes in our midst, divers who have completed each and every dive offered while aboard a liveaboard, whether it be Aggressor or Blackbeard. Most liveabards offer an 'Iron Diver' program, and we have seven current members in our Club who have achieved this pinnacle of diving experience!

Many attempt, few prevail. Our seven Club heroes are Nick Lappano, Judy "D", John Frercks, Pat Considine, Kenny Salstrom, Mike Wessinger, and Mike Wilhelm!

**Leading the pack is Nick Lappano, who has been an Iron Diver four times – almost five times in fact!**

Aqua Cat (Bahamas) in 2010: 26 dives on a Club trip

Blackbeard's (Bahamas) in 2014: 17 dives on solo trip

Explorer II (Turks & Caicos) in 2017: 25 dives on Club trip. **Pat Considine also got an Iron Diver on this trip**

Blackbeard's (Bahamas) in 2019: 17 dives on solo trip

**Sea Swells: what about that last trip?** Nick reports: "On my last Blackbeard's trip in 2021 I only made 15 out of 16 possible dives. I sat out the last dive for safety's sake since the site had an upwelling which on a previous dive had forced me into a VERY rapid ascent. I went from 55 feet to less than 10 feet in about 10 seconds. Luckily, I suffered no ill effects from the incident. I had not yet had a chance to analyze that dive to determine the cause of this rapid ascent and how to prevent it. Even though I knew my streak of unmissed liveaboard dives would end, I sat out the dive in the interest of dive safety. I had avoided a DCS "hit" the first time and did not think it was a good idea to press my luck." **And Nick offers wise counsel to us all "Divers should always put safety first, rather than trying to set records."** Nick, you are a diving hall-of-famer! We are so lucky as individuals and as a Club to benefit from your diving leadership!

On Belize Aggressor the team of Judy "D" and John Frercks completed an ASTOUNDING 23 dives in six days !! Thinking about that, this is a huge number of dives. On liveabards, the boat often transits from spot to spot, cutting down available dives to perhaps 2 or 3 a day. This means that most days Judy and John were diving FOUR and even FIVE dives per day. This is a huge physical stress and demand. Deepest and heartfelt congratulations to them for this monumental accomplishment!

**SS to Judy – DIDN'T YOU GET COLD !??** Judy responds "I always over dress in my 7mil and a hood. I can always get cool by adding water but can't seem to find the hot water faucet while scuba diving if I'm cold. So yes I wear a hood starting the middle of the week as my core body temperature drops a little bit and I feel a chill."

**SS to Judy -- WHY?!?!** Judy: " It wasn't my intention to do every dive, but I felt good enough to do them all. They put up a marker board with everyone's name, and they cross it off as people canceled out on dives. So, it became 'a thing' as people came up to me saying "you know only you and 6 others have the Iron diver, now only 3 have it...you going to stay in it?". And it became a race to complete it and get the award. So I went on some dives that I wasn't really excited for - but it's always good to dive when you feel like you are ready for it, not because of a contest. **And Judy offers her diving experience and wisdom for us all by cautioning:** Only



**dive your limits and your own abilities. Not everyone can or should try to do the iron diver on each trip. After all it's a fun sport and dangerous as well, if you are not careful. Would I do it again??? Well... come on a trip and let's try to both get the award!**

John Frercks offers his views on this subject, thanks for these notes, John! (See below.)

A typical day of liveaboard diving is usually up for breakfast around 7am, then a dive briefing for the morning dives at 8am, and then 'the pool is open' for the first 60-minute dive. After returning to the boat and having an approximate 60-minute surface interval (while the crew refills the tanks), the pool is open for the second morning 60-minute dive. Back on the boat it is time for lunch, and usually the boat will move to a new dive location. After lunch is the dive briefing for the afternoon site, and then the pool magically opens for the two afternoon 60-minute dives. Back on the boat and time for dinner. If there is the possibility of a night dive, then back in the water usually for about 45-minutes or so. Finally, back on the boat for a hot chocolate and then rinsing your wetsuit and then off to socialize or off to bed. And so it goes - for the rest of the week.

Lather, Rinse, Repeat! (Eat, Dive, Sleep!)

I did not think that I would have any problem doing all of the dives. I did not wear a hood except on a couple of the night dives because of the possibility of sea lice or jelly fish in the area of the dive site.

15 of our group dropped off the list as the week went on, and 4 of us prevailed and were awarded the "Iron Diver" status.

For me this was a wonderful vacation! Some people might think that doing all those dives and getting wet at night for night dives and such is 'work'... but not for me.... it did not feel like work at all doing those dives. And Yes, given the chance to be out on another Aggressor Fleet ship --I would definitely go for Iron Diver again!

*How to become an Iron Diver...*

Most recreational divers like to do a couple of easy reef dives in wonderful warm water in the morning, either from a boat or from the shore -and then have some lunch-- and relax for the rest of the day. If you are more into the diving them perhaps you will do another dive after lunch. For divers who aren't afraid of the dark, they might also do a dive at night. For the serious "I actually want to grow gills" diver, then booking a trip on a purpose built SCUBA diving ship is the way to go! Three meals a day, prepared by a 5-star chef, with snacks and beverages, and a dive deck set up so that you don't need to break down your gear between dives -- *makes this the ultimate in diving enjoyment!!*

Our Club's most recent trip included a group of 19 divers from The SCUBA Sports Club! We were fortunate that our "most excellent trip negotiator" was able to get exclusive use of one of the Aggressor Fleet liveaboard ships which operate off the coast of Belize. We boarded the ship, stowed our personal gear in the spacious double occupancy cabins, then set up our dive gear on the tanks which would be ours for our week at sea. I noticed a marker board on the dive deck with each of our divers' names on it - and the title of "Iron Divers". I asked some of my fellow divers if they knew what this was about, but no one did. When in doubt about something on a ship, it is always best to ask the Captain—he explained that the Aggressor company has a diver recognition program for those divers who during their trip participate in every one of the dives that are available to be dived.



Now you may recall that typically recreational divers will do two dives in the morning, have lunch and then perhaps do two dives in the afternoon - and on occasion an additional dive at night. During the course of a typical six-day diving adventure this would mean divers could potentially accumulate as many as thirty dives if the diving conditions and locations are good. *To become awarded "Iron Diver" status the diver must go on all the dives that are available on the trip.* If you don't like to go on night dives, then you don't make the cut. If you enjoy some late night adult beverages and card games and decide to sleep in in the morning and not go on the morning dives, you are off the list. During the course of the week, many of the names in our diving group dropped off of the list for various reasons....

At this point you may be asking yourself "is it hard to go on every dive ?" or "do you get cold diving so much?" The answer to both questions is Yes. But if you really love being in your element underwater, then diving that much is not hard. If you get cold after repetitive diving, then wearing some appropriate level of thermal protection will overcome being chilled. In the warm waters of the Caribbean, I find for me that wearing a 3mm "shorty" suit over a full body dive skin keeps me warm and protected from being underwater repetitively. After dinner on the last evening of the trip, the Captain then explained how the "Iron Diver" award came to be a part of the Aggressor Fleet experience, and that four of our group had in fact completed all 23 of the available Dives during the Six days that we were at sea! And so Judy Dronzek, Mike Wessinger, Mike Wilhelm and I were awarded the coveted "Iron Diver" award. **Would I do it again ? You better believe it !!**

#### **Pat Considine—one of our Clubs luminaries & distinguished divers, and an Iron Diver—now weighs in!**

Pat: I love diving and will dive each and every opportunity! That being said, I firmly believe that each and every diver can – and should – terminate a dive at any time for any reason if they have any reservations. On my Turcs and Caicos liveaboard, Nick and I were roommates, and admittedly there was a slight bit of competition going on between us, and neither of us would miss an opportunity for a night dive! I also got the award for being the first person in the water on every dive. (Truth is, I gear up quickly due to practice...). I DO believe that qualified and motivated divers SHOULD endeavor to get the Iron Diver award; it is a wonderful feeling to achieve that distinction! It is a rarified group of highest-achieving divers! It is also a great way to maximize the value of the liveaboard experience which, after all, can be costly. But also because it maximizes our exposure to the wonders of the undersea world to which we are only passing through as guests. The Aggressor fleet is to be commended for encouraging the highest level of diving participation – it helps advance the sport and is an important way to skill build through repeated diving experiences. This is the way to really learn diving at the highest level !

I averaged 5 dives per day on the liveaboard and would try for this award again in a second if the opportunity presented! Aggressor and other liveaboard companies are very focused on diver safety. There is a dive professional on every dive leading the group, and most operations adjust the type of diving to the skill level of guests. Without that level of close supervision and intense focus on safety, an Iron Diver program would introduce risks to the divers. My belief though is that Aggressor has a total handle on diver safety as numero uno. If a diver is unfit for the competition, they will be invited to withdraw if they don't withdraw on their own. Aggressor as an example eschews wreck diving unless the skill level of all divers is at that level. As an instructor, I absolutely believe in diving within your training limits – and that is why I myself am constantly training (such as cave training with a qualified instructor) to increase my own skill levels! And, I encourage you to do the same!



**Sea Swells comments:** there has been some good discussion around warmth on these Iron Diver repeated dives. Judy wears a hood of EVERY dive. There is wisdom behind this practice because 1) during daylight dives under bright sunny skies, wearing a hood prevents sunburn of the scalp — which for some aging males (like your newsletter publisher) is a clear and present danger 2) wearing a hood protects the scalp from jellyfish and other nasty creatures; I can just imagine the horror of a lionfish sting to the scalp!) and 3) we know from mountaineering that 70% of all heat loss is through.. you guessed it... the head. We also know that reduced body core temperature resulting from heat loss through the head also negatively affects judgment. So, if you inclined to wear a hood, WEAR A HOOD. NICK of course had a different take on warmth (but consider the source... this is a guy who dove Dutch in January in a wetsuit!! )... As Iron Diver, he did NOT wear a hood, except on the night dives. He affirmed to SS that he loves diving, and that is why he went for Iron Diver. And, he admitted that he was worried that if he sat out that one dive, that "will be the one where everyone comes back saying 'we saw a... You should have been there!'". And when pressed for WHY the Iron Diver was so important to him, with a twinkle in his eye, Nick confesses "I have a reputation to defend!" Nick indicated that there was no undue stress on his system since he felt there was sufficient time to rest up between dives... Nick must be in great physical/cardio conditioning!

**To wrap up, your TSSC leadership team offers Heartfelt congratulations to our seven heroes and take a victory lap.** SS would love sometime to get a photo of all of you together holding your medals for the camera! To the rest of us, maybe we will make Iron Diver one day, maybe we won't – but together we celebrate our diving legends and leaders who have endured and prevailed in this triumph!





## I FINALLY DOVE IN! My First Diving Experiences

Melissa Miceli



For more than ten years I have happily accompanied my husband, Gene Miceli on many fun and beautiful tropical destinations with The Scuba Sports Club. As a non-diver, I would often make my way to the docks in the morning with the divers and observe how they gathered their gear with excitement and boarded the boats to sail off to begin their exploration — to depths of the ocean which I could only imagine! After seeing them off, I would make my way to find the other few non-divers who had also joined the trip, and plan how we would spend the few hours we had without our companions. Usually, it consisted of finding a spot somewhere by the pool or the beach, where we could relax and enjoy the tropical waters from the comfort of our chaise lounge!

Gene and I have enjoyed the ocean for all of the years we have been together. Our honeymoon in Hawaii and various trips thereafter were always filled with water activities such as snorkeling—this was well before our diving days.

It wasn't long after those snorkeling filled vacations that Gene caught the *scuba diving bug*! I must admit that it definitely peaked my interest as well. As a science major in college, I have always loved to learn and observe the amazing animals and environments that this special planet holds for those who seek to learn. The ocean deep and its inhabitants had a special mystery and magic! I took a 'discover scuba' class, and I felt fine in the water. However I was reticent about open ocean water deeper than the YMCA pool. I decided that I was not cut out for this, and to put scuba diving aside until I was truly ready to commit. Joining trips with Gene as a non-diving spouse was wonderful and I was content to wish the divers 'have a great dive!'.

Then, spontaneously, I caught the scuba diving bug too !

Maybe it was the pandemic and having to wear a mask every day which affected my thoughts - or maybe the lure of exotic dive destinations like Egypt... but after the amazing reefs I explored in March 2021 when TSSC was in Roatan, Honduras — something changed. I joined the boat as a snorkeler for a shallow dive, and watching the beautiful reefs and the divers down below who were getting a closer look, I suddenly made the decision to try scuba again. One of those reasons—or maybe all three— are what impelled me to try again after more than ten years!

Perhaps my mistake (or good fortune!) was mentioning to Gene my renewed interest. He nearly fell over when I told him that I was thinking about getting my certification. And this is where my journey begins...

After letting Gene in on my revelation I almost started to regret it immediately. I'm sure he knew that if he sat idly by and didn't push me a little then it probably wouldn't really happen, because there was still some hesitation about this on my part. Well, his little push is more like a shove that consisted of finding and making me watch all of his PADI and SSI DVD's; reading the dive manuals from his PADI course; trying on one of his wetsuits; and then finally bringing me to Rob's dive shop to discuss and sign up for an upcoming weekend course! I'm grateful for his little shove, because the more I prepared myself the more comfortable I became with the sport and the training to get back into the water. Also, the ten years of being around the very knowledgeable members of the Club listening to all the talk of regulators, drysuits, Perdix computers and the arcana of scuba diving, I felt that I had learned so much about scuba gear just through osmosis!

Being back in the pool so many years later, I was much more comfortable and relaxed. I started to envision the magical mysteries to behold under the waves blowing bubbles with my husband and all our diving friends!



## I FINALLY DOVE IN! My First Diving Experiences

Melissa Miceli



After a successful training course, the four open water dives I needed to complete certification were now facing me. I had an interest in heading to Florida in favor of warm, clear waters. On the other hand, I knew that a weekend trip out to Bethlehem, PA was a more reasonable option to quickly address this requirement. I ultimately decided I would rather stay local for the benefit of working with two instructors who have encouraged and helped me throughout this process.

So, it was off to Dutch Springs for a weekend in early September to meet with Joe Rinaldi and Pat Considine. Two very patient instructors who encouraged and worked with me every step (or fin kick) of the way. I was even lucky enough to have a dive entourage to support me throughout the weekend. Al Miller joined and organized a BBQ lunch – Nick, Ed, and Poppy came out to help cheer me on as well. Gene also joined — but I think Joe and Pat would have preferred he stayed home or limited his contribution to solely carrying the tanks! All of the support came in handy as the dive conditions that weekend were far from the expectations of Florida waters. The guys tell me the viz was less than 10 feet and although the water was not warm, diving in the 7m wetsuit I was wearing was not as cold as I was expecting. Despite the less than ideal conditions, I felt I completed my Open Water dives rather well, and managed to remain calm. I left that weekend with a sense of accomplishment—but acknowledging that I had work to do to improve my air consumption and my buoyancy control. It was a bit difficult in pea soup to have much reference in helping me recognize if I was where I wanted to be in the water column. But nevertheless, here I was on a Sunday afternoon in September about four weeks after opening my mouth and over ten years after trying scuba in a YMCA pool – a certified diver!

And as I have learned from being married to Gene for twenty years, give him an inch and he will take a foot! I apparently surpassed expectations at Dutch Springs, so he proposed that I continue in another couple weeks and become an Advanced Open Water diver. And, while I was at it, I should work to become certified to use enriched air so I can dive with the group on TSSC trips in the future and follow similar profiles. So it was back to Dutch for a few more days to complete the open water dives for the specialties I selected. Again, bless the patience of Joe and Pat as *land navigation* can be a challenge for me in itself, let alone underwater using a compass in the dark. A word of caution, please don't follow me on a dive because I was likely following you! Also, no drysuit needed here. Deep diving at Dutch was far from my favorite part of the entire experience. Maybe it was the thermoclines and temperature change I felt, but at 90' of cold water I was far from feeling comfortable. I got through the dive but knew at that moment I was never going to have much interest in deep Northeast diving.

While I was advancing and gaining experience from my dives in Dutch Springs, Gene was still intent on making a long weekend in Florida a reality. So off to the Keys we went in late September 2021. As word spread around of our sneaking out of town, a few of you reached out in wanting to come help me get more ocean diving experience. It was nice to have friends come along (thank you Jack, Stephanie, Al, Judy, Nick, Vinnie & Will) — I'll take whatever moral support is available, anytime! Although the weather was ideal in the Keys with 85-degree days and nothing but sunshine, the seas were rough. Even with the use of motion sickness meds several of us were unable to do much diving. I did manage to get in a few dives, but did not do nearly as much as I wanted to. In those few dives that I did do, I found notable improvement with my buoyancy control but I really needed to work on my air consumption.

At this point I thought the dive season was closing for me, and I may not be able to get back in the water until May when we head out to the Red Sea. But yet again, I was wrong. Gene was



## I FINALLY DOVE IN! My First Diving Experiences

Melissa Miceli



now insisting we needed to find another long weekend and get more diving in as a part of building my experience. And, getting that done before being so far from home in Egypt. Before I knew it I was on a plane heading down to Cozumel, Mexico in mid- December. We stayed at the Occidental Cozumel which many of you may remember because the Club visited there in 2016, and it was also the first trip that I joined with the Club.

We arranged eight dives over four days with Pro Dive Mexico which operates on the resort property. American Airlines had so many delays and we missed our only connection out of Miami to Cozumel. With no other flights, we were put up in a nice hotel in Miami and had to trim our time at the resort. Pro Dive was great and helped us move missed dives into afternoons for when we would finally arrive. Aside from the brutal pre-holiday travel snafus, the time spent in Mexico was fantastic.

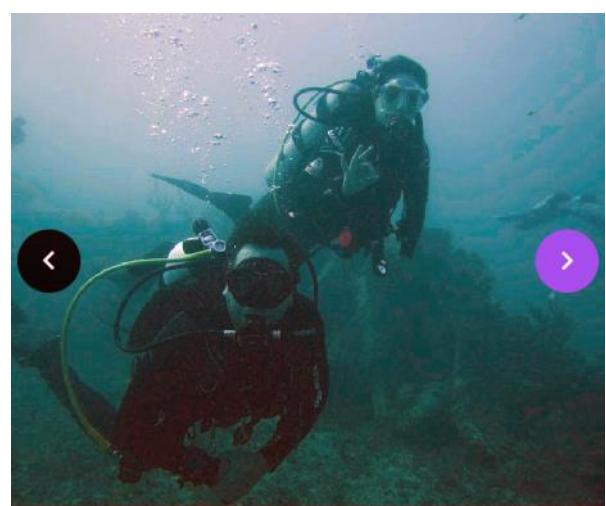
*Heading away from that very same dock on a dive boat—which several years ago I had watched all of you depart aboard — was quite cool! This time I had dive gear in my arms, and I was the one stepping onto the boat to claim a spot and set-up. No longer was I the one watching the boat sail off into the distance, and then searching for that chaise lounge.*

The conditions could not have been better. Water was glass flat and visibility was unbelievable. This trip was exactly what I needed to further build my confidence and skills. Being able to see the bottom from 80ft up I found descending to be much easier, and the same could be said for ascents. Buoyancy control was great because there was always a beautiful reef to use to gauge my depth (aside from my computer). Pro Dive recognized my few logged dives and shared this with every dive master we dove with. The groups we were assigned to were typically made up of new or less experienced divers as well. It was probably dive # three of eight when I started to work on my breathing pattern – trying to make my inhale just as the books suggest – long, slow and deep. I quickly started to realize my SPG was dropping less. Maybe by the fourth dive on day two I was matching air consumption with my dive partner who has been doing this for more than a decade J. I really did find that all the diving in Cozumel allowed me to find a routine to the process. *I realized then that I had been bitten by the dive bug!* The thought of staying another day to squeeze in more dives was suddenly appealing. But the reality of work and the kids we left back at home was calling me back to New York. Or, maybe it was the fact that the Covid test we needed to fly home was only valid for the next 24 hours!

It's hard to believe what I have accomplished over the last five months. I still sometimes think back to the many wonderful and inquisitive friends I have met through this Club who would ask me when I would dive in for myself. Well, I finally did — and I'm loving it, all the while kicking myself for taking so long. And to all my non-diver friends who I've spent so much time with, I still don't see myself adopting the Nick Lappano dive schedule — so save a chaise lounge, preferably with some shade, for me. Stay well, and Happy New Year!



## I FINALLY DOVE IN! My First Diving Experiences Melissa Miceli





## LIONFISH Survival Tactics !

Mike Wilhelm



Keep hands and feet away from the lionfish!!

TSSC family — My name is Mike Wilhelm. I recently returned from a great week aboard the Belize Aggressor. Big thanks to Jack and Judy for putting together this fantastic trip. The boat was very comfortable. The room AC's were frigid. The food was much too good. The single source of anxiety on the trip was a local reef shark named 'Patches' and all of his shark friends who came a little too close for comfort... especially when we were spearing lionfish.

This brings me to three painful lessons learned from a week of lionfish hunting:

Be very careful handling a speared lionfish. They are tough and being speared does not kill them. I had been taught to take a dive knife and cut their necks beneath their gills. This works just fine as long as the fish is still. If it is moving or your hand slips, you can easily be spiked by a venomous fin. This happened to my thumb and was very painful. The boat captain had me place my thumb in as hot of water as I could handle for 10 minutes. He said this would enable the venom to seep out. This helped and I was able to continue diving. I had a sore thumb for several days and a blood blister for 2 weeks.

Future advice from the boat captain — once a lionfish is speared, find a rock or ledge to scrape it off. Do not take the risk of coming in contact with its fins. If you plan to eat the lionfish, you can take this risk.

Do not use your scuba fins to pull a Lionfish off of your spear! This was my second big mistake of the week, and I am still feeling the affects. I had no intention of using a dive knife again. To remove a lionfish from my spear I placed the spear between my two flippers and pulled the fish off. Unfortunately, one of its dorsal fins went through the thick bottom of my flipper, dive boot and finally a half inch into the bottom of my foot. The divemaster had to wiggle the broken dorsal fin from my fin and dive boot while I swam with one flipper. My foot is still sensitive and a bit swollen and will probably take a while longer to completely heal.

If sharks are in the area, don't spear lionfish- 'Patches' and his Reef Shark friends seemed to quickly smell the blood of a speared lionfish. Twice during the week they grabbed lionfish off of spears. After eating a lionfish, they would then start to swim erratically and even bumped into us. I don't know if they would have gotten excited enough to bite us, but we were concerned. On one dive we found ourselves swimming very close together to avoid the erratic sharks and made a beeline to the boat and out of the water.

If you decide to hunt lionfish, I hope you find the good advice of the Belize Aggressor boat captain helpful. If you want to know what not to do, you've got that, too.

Mike

**Publisher Post-Script — Lionfish are the subject of this Sea Swell edition's Featured Creature ! Check it out in this issue. And... GET EVEN—EAT A LIONFISH !!**

Insert Mike  
Wilhelm  
Photo

## LIONFISH Survival Tactics !

Mike Wilhelm



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**Publisher Post-Script — Lionfish are the subject of this Sea Swell edition's Featured Creature ! Check it out in this issue. And... GET EVEN—EAT A LIONFISH !!**



## Diving Belize's Great Blue Hole !

Kenneth Andreu



Belize's Great Blue Hole was one of the favorite dive sites of Jacques Cousteau. A nod from Jacques Cousteau is pretty impressive, and though his designation of top-five-in-the-world might not hold, descending into the glowing blue depths has kept this 1000-foot-wide spot top of many divers' hit list. Midnight parrotfish, Caribbean reef sharks, turtles and the occasional hammerhead or stocky bull shark might be spotted along the way. A coral-covered shelf at 40 feet slopes down to the deeper, darker waters where sharks often circle. Most come for the hole itself, superman'ing over the endless blue of the marine sinkhole, or the massive stalactite-filled cave, (at 130 feet so keep your buddy close and prep for a hit of narcosis). Before you know it, thanks to the depth killing your bottom time, you'll be drifting up to the light along with tendrils of tiny bubbles from other dive groups.





## TSSC Dives Roatan — Take Three !

J-u-d-y "D"



Just a few months earlier diving was so good in Roatan, Honduras that TSSC members decided to come back but to another resort; this time on the East end. This is by far the quieter, less populated area. The Turquoise Bay Resort offers a lovely setup of beach, pool and diving amenities. The staff were very pleasant, and everything kept clean and orderly. They take caring for others and the environment serious, and only give paper straws when asked and paper cups on the dive boats to help cut down on the single use waste.

The dive shop boasts eco-tourism by teaching lionfish hunting and coral restoration courses. More than half of the TSSC divers took to the lionfish hunting and after lots of misses — we finally got a few. But spearfishing these spiny slow looking creatures is much harder than it looks. In total our group got about 2 dozen, which may not seem like a lot but the fact that just one female can birth over 225,000 makes a long-term difference! Plus, lionfish are very tasty to eat, as the hotel cooked the fish for us to enjoy. Those that took the class received a certificate that allows us to hunt for two years in a few countries (including Belize, which a few planned on using)! One of the days their half of the TSSC divers learned about coral restoration. Those divers helped maintain the coral trees by scrubbing them and planting the new growths.

Kevin Cushing gave a full presentation about his personal experiences of doing this during the August member meeting. Kevin's firsthand experiences and the others who spent the day learning led to Amanda being able to book a full on club presentation by Tripp Funderburk of the Bay Islands Reef Restoration in October's club meeting.

Diving visibility averaged about 60-80 ft with little to no currents to fight. We saw morays, spotted rays, groupers, turtles, queen angels, trumpet, puffers, flamingo tongues, conch, sun fish, and silversides galore. Most dives were easy, and some learned they don't like to do swim throughs due to tightness, claustrophobia or darkness. Some





## TSSC Dives Roatan — Take Three !

J-u-d-y “D”



learned night diving was not their thing, as we waited on the Sandy bottom with lights off waiting for the bioluminescence to occur. Many did not understand the concept of waiting as the lights kept going on and off, so most of us never got the full effect of seeing the pearl of strings. Many divers got all the dives in and some took a few dives off; but we all enjoyed the dives we did.

On the last day some went to the West End and walked around, had a few drinks, ate some chocolates from the factory, bought a shirt or two at the Coral Restoration Project shop and enjoyed an excellent dinner at Harry's on the water. Overall Roatan was a good place to go diving but the covid pandemic really hit the island of Roatan hard, as all their imports of food were stopped. People were hungry especially on the more rural side of the island where we stayed. We could clearly notice the difference in diving between the East and West ends; as there was a lack of sea life which we later found out much of it was fished out for people to feed their families. Good news is the island is begging to get tourists back and food delivery again; so, they are more observant and watchful over their take from the ocean.

After talking with a few locals my fears were confirmed that the zoo encounter with the Sloths was another cruel exploitative wildlife attraction. Many people are drawn to animal attractions out of love for animals but end up causing more cruelty by partaking in these activities. I know as I previously did not understand what actually happens until several of my friends went undercover to see firsthand how many animals were actually given tranquilizers to tame them for the photos and how the older animals are no longer useful despite being these exotic majestic, endangered animals. I was thrilled that no one on this trip went to the sloth attraction. Even with good intentions, it's difficult to tell an inhumane operation from an ethical one. Inhumane animal attractions come in many forms and involve a plethora of species, from cub petting attractions to unethical safari operators who disturb wild animals. All too often animals suffer physical and psychological distress for human entertainment. Inhumane attractions often deceive visitors into believing they are helping animals. They market themselves as

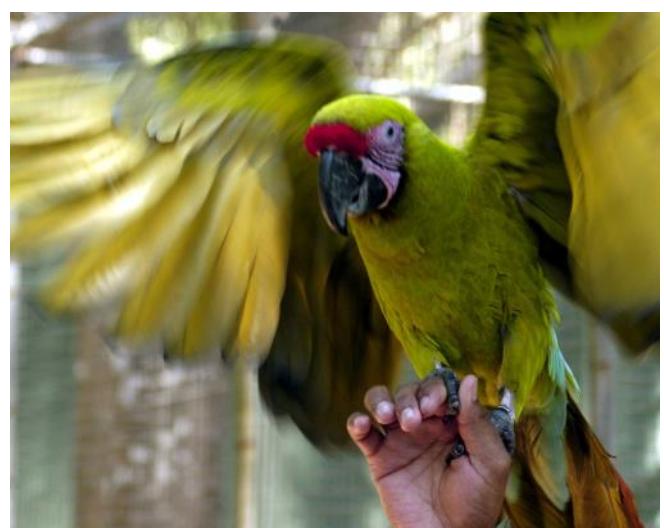


## TSSC Dives Roatan — Take Three !

J-u-d-y "D"



"sanctuaries" and tell the public they are contributing to conservation efforts by breeding endangered species. But the animals bred in these places will never be released into the wild but bred solely for entertainment profits. A simple rule is to avoid any place that offers direct interactions with wild animals. Despite the cute façade sloths are easily stressed when handled as are otters who also become aggressive when aggravated. These animals might also be captured from the wild for use in captive displays around the world, plus these attractions inspire more people to purchase exotic pets. So, the bottom line is let us all try to leave with memories from our vacations and leave as little a foot print as we can while enjoying our time elsewhere and even in our own backyards!





## TSSC Dives Roatan — Take Three !

J-u-d-y "D"





## TSSC Dives Roatan — Take Three !

J-u-d-y "D"





## TSSC's September DECO Stop

Kevin Cushing



### ***Putting the Sport back in The Scuba Sports Club !***

The name of the club speaks for itself. However, it seems in recent years, part of that name has been left in the shadows. That all changed for the September Deco Stop.

On Saturday, September 18th, seven members of the club put the SPORT back in Scuba Sport Club by taking part in a bike ride from Millwood, NY to Yorktown Heights, NY. Social Director Liza Handziak arranged the first official Deco stop since February 2020! It's been a challenging year for everyone and gathering indoors didn't seem to be in the cards for the past 18 months.

However, with rates stabilizing, and people feeling safer in outdoor activities, the bike ride seemed like a perfect plan.

Charlie Adams, Robert Cofer, Kevin Cushing, Liza Handziak, Stephanie Hernandez, James Kafka, Jack Ricotta, and Deborah Weiss all rode the thirteen-mile round trip trail over the Croton Reservoir bridge. Kenny Salstrom met the group in Yorktown Heights for lunch.

And what a lunch it was! It came as surprise to all, when upon arrival, a San Genaro Festival was just getting started. Garlic knots, zeppole, sausage and peppers, beer, and all the usual treats were just getting warmed up to serve to the hungry bikers.

Two picnic tables were pulled tip to tail so the group could all enjoy the day together. There's nothing like having a beer with friends on a late summer afternoon under the shade of an oak in the park while an Italian band goes through its warmup. Most agreed that a bike ride could be an annual event and something that we'd like to do again.

Amazingly, this group of divers turns out to be pretty good bikers, too. Some even looked like professionals. No mechanical issues. No flat tires. No tired riders...well...that might not be true. But everyone made it through cleanly and got to enjoy a day on the trail.

Once again, the best part of this club is the members. It's always such a joy to exchange stories and talk about upcoming adventures.

Hearing the history of the club is fascinating, too. I have a feeling there is much more history to be written by this club!



## TSSC's September DECO Stop

Kevin Cushing



*Putting the Sport back in The Scuba Sports Club !*





## TSSC's October DECO Stop

Kevin Cushing



### The Big Apple Picking !!!

When people think of Westchester County, NY in autumn, one thing is certain to come to mind: apple picking! It's a time-honored tradition in these parts. This year was not different, even if it comes after a year like no other.

The October Deco Stop was planned for Saturday, October 16<sup>th</sup> at 10am at Wilken's Fruit and Fir Farm in Yorktown Heights. The event was planned by Social Director Liza Handziak. In addition to Liza, also attending was Sharon Behnke, Kevin Cushing, James Kafka, Danny Levin, and Ann Marie Mazzucco.

As it turned out, it was the perfect day. Six members of The Scuba Sports Club experienced ideal fall weather. Morning temperatures in the upper 60's climbed to low 70's by early afternoon and made for a great day. The filtered sunlight highlighted the turning colors, and views of the mountains in the distance glistened in their autumnal glory.

Wilken's farm features Pick Your Own and that's just what the club did. Apples, pumpkins, cider donuts, pastries, and cookies were no match for this crew. After the picking was done, the six gathered at a picnic table and had some time to catch up on each other's recent travels and future plans. In fact, Danny and Sharon realized they had been on a trip together to Bonaire five years ago before they knew each other. As great as the treats were, it doesn't compare to the smiles on everyone's faces after so much time apart.

The farm also features a winery which opened at noon. Five members had a tasting flight and sampled the wine offerings. The consensus was that the wine may have needed some more time to mature. None of the six thought any of the wine was "bottle worthy." However, those who bought the flight were able to keep the logo glass as a memory of le vin ordinaire.

By the time the wine tasting was complete, the day was almost through. However, there was one more adventure for three brave souls. The corn maze awaited! It was decided that the buddy system would be activated, and turns were taken as the "maze-master." Whenever the leader would come to a dead end, the next person would take the lead. By the time the third leader came to the fore, he was able to lead the group of three safely to the exit. A sigh of relief was felt by all when, despite all the possibilities for trouble, no one experienced any ear issues.

Around 2:00 pm the place was packed with pickers of all ages. It was time to go. Everyone was happy to have had such a beautiful day and excellent company.



## TSSC's October DECO Stop

Kevin Cushing



## The Big Apple Picking !!!

Liza in the Pumpkin Patch



(L to R) Kevin, Liza, Danny, James, Sharon, Ann Marie

A view of the orchard !





## TSSC's November DECO Stop

Kevin Cushing



### Walkway Over The Hudson !!

As great as spring and summer is in upstate New York, there may not be a better time to be outdoors than autumn. And when the air is crisp and clear, and the wind is calm, there may not be a better place to be than on the Hudson River, or in our case, above it.

On November 6<sup>th</sup>, five TSSC members took the 3 mile round trip over the mighty river. Liza Handziak, Kenneth Salstrom, Robert Cofer, Amanda Slattery, and Kevin Cushing bundled up and made the trek. The day was perfectly clear and calm, perfect for walking, talking and taking pictures.

With downtown Poughkeepsie directly under the bridge, it makes for a fantastic day trip. After a nice walk across the and back over the river, the club had lunch at the Mill House Brewing Company. Plenty of good food options, and more beers than I can count made this stop a great choice. Big thanks to Liza who organized this Deco Stop.

The Walkway Over the Hudson has a long and fascinating history. When it opened in 1889, it was the longest bridge in the world! The railway bridge connected Poughkeepsie to Highland, New York. Both freight cars and passenger cars used the connector as a path between Boston to the north and Philadelphia, Harrisburg, and Washington to the south.

Originally unpainted, during World War II, the bridge was painted black to be less visible to enemy surveillance. In 1974, a fire caused by a train spark caused major damage. The fire was not reported immediately and was out of control by the time fire fighters arrived. By the time the fire was out, the great connector was no longer passable.

The bridge would lay in disrepair for over 30 years. The Coast Guard asked for it to be torn down. But in 1998 the Poughkeepsie-Highland Railroad Co, a non-profit run by Bill Sepie, acquired the derelict structure with the goal of returning it to its former glory, only this time, as a pedestrian walkway.

The Walkway over the Hudson opened in 2009 and sees over a half-million visitors annually. In 2021, The Scuba Sports Club provided five of those visitors!



## TSSC's November DECO Stop

Kevin Cushing



## Walkway Over The Hudson !!





## Dubai (United Arab Emirates) and Expo 2020 / 21



Gary Lehman

In November 2021, my wife and I went to Dubai to attend Expo/2020. Our flights were non-stop JFK Airport to/from Dubai on Emirates Airlines - aboard a brand-new A380-800. Great aircraft, great airline...the seats were comfortable and spacious, the food was quite good and was served promptly (and with trays also removed promptly) - all the more impressive, since this is a double-decker aircraft with over 450 passengers aboard. The entertainment package was the most comprehensive I have ever seen. You can watch movies, documentaries, hear music from all over the world and even play video games if so inclined for the 12-hour outbound/14-hour return direct flight.

Because we had an early morning flight out, we decided to stay over the night before at JFK airport at the 1960's-themed TWA Hotel. *It was shag-a-delic, baby!* If you need a hit of 1960's culture and music let me tell you this is the place to go! [TWA Hotel at New York's JFK Airport](#) I especially enjoyed boarding the Lockheed Constellation ("Connie") - a handsome and sleek 4-engine propeller passenger airliner on static display. With original seats no less! We had drinks and snacks aboard the aircraft before heading up to the heated rooftop pool which boasts a JFK airport operations observatory. Here you can watch JFK airport's passenger aircraft taking off and landing.

Dubai's Expo / 2020 was rescheduled from 2020 to 2021 due to Covid-19. The Fair is open from October 2021 through March 2022. Some of us will be headed to or through the region while en route to dive destinations in Oman, Seychelles, Maldives, and other dive locations. Flights often relay to those places through Dubai or Abu Dhabi (also in the United Arab Emirates, about 90 minutes by car from Dubai). *If that is the case for you, and you plan to travel to or through the region before the end of March 2022, this article and Expo/2020 is for you!*

### Dubai and the United Arab Emirates

Before discussing Expo / 2020, first we will offer some comments about Dubai City. Dubai looks like the City of Oz in the *Wizard of Oz* with fantastic, soaring, innovative skyline architecture joining the world's most impressive skylines of Hong Kong, Doha, Frankfurt, Shanghai, and Singapore! Dubai has the Burj Al Arab hotel (which resembles a sail fully catching the wind) (this is a SEVEN-STAR hotel...I did not even know that was a 'thing') and the Burj Khalifa (tallest building in the world at 2722' tall!). Dubai boasts the biggest/best of everything – world's tallest building, a mall with an indoor



## Dubai (United Arab Emirates) and Expo 2020 / 21



skating rink, another mall with an indoor ski slope, the deepest pool (more on that in another article in this issue), the world's most extravagant and expensive mosque, the biggest (tallest water column) fountain, the biggest water park, the biggest aquarium in the Middle East, world's most expansive mall, the biggest Expo, the tallest ferris wheel, an aquarium inside yet another mall, and some outrageously great restaurants! To celebrate the 50th anniversary since the founding of the UAE, the country launched its Amal probe (Hope) to Mars – which is the first extraterrestrial mission from the Arab world.

These excesses are of course, funded by oil revenues - but there is much more to Dubai and the United Arab Emirates. Walking through the malls (malls are a BIG thing in Dubai...) we observed Muslim women in full-body veils (burka) walking next to and speaking with scantily-clad Emiratis and Westerners. (Personally, however, I think Westerners should be a little more respectful of local norms and cover up a bit.) UAE is an eminently safe, tolerant and diverse society. For example, Alicia Keys was the keynote performer at Expo / 2020 while we were there.

UAE is working hard and successfully to be a leading example for diversity and inclusion throughout the entire region. In a historic ceremony in November 2021, the Israeli flag was raised and the UAE Army band welcomed the Israeli Ambassador to the UAE Amir Hayek with the Israeli national anthem (Hatikva). The ceremony was conducted at UAE's Qasr Al Watan Presidential Palace.

And the UAE is dead serious as far as ISIS/ISIL is concerned. The UAE Air Force conducts hundreds of bombing missions against ISIS/ISIL targets throughout the region (and even out of Jordan striking Syrian ISIS/ISIL targets). The UAE partners with the US in these strikes. There is a website dedicated to US/UAE 50 years of friendship and joint endeavors <https://www.uaeusaunited.com/> .

The most interesting things to do in Dubai are Expo / 2020; watching the Dubai Fountains display; taking a desert safari with dune buggies - or a vintage Land Rover jeep, and maybe even taking a camel ride; exploring all the malls; going to the top of the Burj Khalifa; visiting the old city and visiting the museums in the waterfront area (these were shut during our visit, unfortunately, owing to Covid.) There is also the souk (marketplace – a warren of twisting alleyways with all manner of goods to buy, organized by product group – the spice market, the gold market, the fabric/textiles market, perfume market, jewelry and on and on...) **AND...DeepDiveDubai (see the article in this issue...)** The metro rail system is excellent, immaculate, safe, cheap and easily accessible and easy to navigate. Our hotel was right on the metro line, and most mornings we just hopped on the metro and proceeded comfortably to the Expo grounds.



## Dubai (United Arab Emirates) and Expo 2020 / 21



### Abu Dhabi

We also made a one-day side trip to Abu Dhabi, which was well worth the trip. Our first stop was the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque. The mosque is named after Sheikh Zayed, the Arab leader who in 1968 united the various tribes in the area, forming the United Arab Emirates. Sheikh Zayed is still revered today in the UAE for his leadership. The Grand Mosque is stunning beyond words. It is only open at certain times, and not when worshippers are praying. Tours are closely escorted; the watchful staff keeps the visitor lines moving at all times. Architecturally the mosque recalls India's Taj Mahal. Curiously, the mosque has a modern mall on the same campus; this, of course, provides a convenient shopping venue when the guided tour concludes! The mosque can accommodate 40,000 worshippers, is adorned with semi-precious inlaid stones throughout, features the world's most giant crystal chandelier, and also cost \$2 billion to build. It is an impressive must-see spectacle!

(Historical note: some of you may remember the stunning film Lawrence of Arabia, released in 1962 – absolutely one of the best films of all time. Peter O'Toole plays Lieutenant Thomas Edward (T.E.) Lawrence, a British Army officer assigned by the British High Command to assess the prospects of Arabs helping the British to fight the Ottoman Turks in WWI. In the early part of the film, Lieutenant Lawrence gets an early exposure to Arab tribalism when a Bedouin tribe leader (played brilliantly by Omar Sharif) shoots and kills Lawrence's guide because he was drinking water from a forbidden well. Lawrence explodes in anger and goes into a tirade about the need to end Arab tribalism, and for the building of Arab unity if the Arab nations are to ever progress into the modern community of nations. Lawrence's wording was rather blunt, and you can find it readily on Google! In any case, I believe that Sheik Zayed – future founder of the UAE- must have seen the film and may have been personally stung by this condemnation of Arab tribalism by Lawrence and taken it to heart, resounding as it was through the decades from 1916 to 1962 when the film was released. Sheik Zayed endeavored successfully to unite the seven Emirates in the geography, which then came to be known as the United Arab Emirates. And the UAE has undertaken a progressive program of unity and accommodation for the entire region as noted above ever since, which continued after Sheik Zayed's passing in 2004.)

### The OUTSTANDING National Aquarium in Abu Dhabi / United Arab Emirates

On our one-day sojourn to Abu Dhabi, we also visited the newly-opened National Aquarium. This is one of the world's biggest aquariums, and the biggest in the Middle East. The Aquarium officially opened on November 12, 2021. The National Aquarium is world-class, no doubt about it. The Aquarium concentrates on the fish found in the Arabian (Persian) Gulf. However, the subsurface habitats and resident species of other regions are represented as well. Indeed, you can hand-feed Arctic puffins - right there in Abu Dhabi!



## Dubai (United Arab Emirates) and Expo 2020 / 21



There are 46,000 fish and animals in the Aquarium and over 330 species. One of the main attractions was the walkthrough Aquarium tunnel. Kind of like having a surface interval while still underwater! The tables are turned and with the humans in the tunnel, the FISH are swimming free, and WE are in the cage!

Being there is especially captivating at shark feeding time, when the black-tip reef and sand tiger sharks start crowding in towards the Aquarium staffer for their feeding. These were some BIG sand tiger sharks, and even though they won't go out of their way to display aggression towards humans, you never want to crowd them or make them feel threatened in any way, shape or form! They expend less energy by just eating the fish provided to them by the Aquarium staff, rather than helping themselves to the other fish in the Aquarium (although that has been known to happen...)

Speaking of sharks, this Aquarium is only one of two I am aware of featuring bull sharks. I know the Oklahoma Aquarium also does (and maybe an aquarium in Australia?), but I don't think there are any others worldwide. I did not know in advance that the National Aquarium of UAE has bull sharks in its tanks. Which is why – when I spotted the distinctive fat, solid, and thick-bodied shark with its distinctive snout and caudal fin swimming towards me, I was at first filled with a surge of alarm and then flabbergasted to see what I knew was a bull shark coming at me; *that was truly the last thing I expected to see.* I was glad to watch it without worrying about my remaining air or the rest of the dive group's relative position! I was also mighty glad not to worry about an adventurous, impudent parrotfish biting my ear and drawing blood in the water...!!!

At the Aquarium, we selected the *Behind the Scenes* tour, which brought us down into the inner workings of the Aquarium. The spirit of the founding father of the United Arab Emirates - Sheik Zayed - figures prominently in the establishment of this Aquarium, because he was an ardent naturalist and environmentalist during his lifetime. His thoughts and writings inspired UAE's current leadership to develop this marvelous Aquarium. A signal feature is the Aquarium's community outreach to local schools, bringing children in to learn about and marvel at the maritime legacy all around them in the Arabian Gulf. The Aquarium also participates in turtle-tagging programs, and learning more about local turtles' life cycles and migration patterns. In one celebrated rescue, a multi-agency effort coordinated by the National Aquarium rescued a 20' whale shark that became disoriented in a canal. The staff carefully and skillfully directed it back out 20km into the open water of the Arabian Gulf -- resulting in one happy whale shark! All the more critical, because whale sharks are increasingly endangered due to habitat destruction and drift nets in some of their nursery areas.



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With 46,000 animals to care for, the veterinary services onsite at the Aquarium are expansive. (Some operating theaters and extensive medical facilities reminded me of a mobile hospital!) There are state-of-the-art MRIs to help with diagnostics and treatment of Aquarium resident patients. And the community-at-large is aware of the veterinary treatment skills at the Aquarium, and people bring in injured or sick animals to the Aquarium's veterinarians. The team does a great job of rehabilitating injured animals (or, in some cases providing them a safe place to stay for the animals unable to be returned to the wild.) And hats off to the engaging, diverse, impressively-knowledgeable and international staff at the Aquarium for teaching the children who come to visit (and even old-timers like me, too!) What a terrific place for these staff members to launch their careers in such a world-class, soon-to-be-internationally renowned Aquarium. Long story short: visit, enjoy and support this outstanding Aquarium while you are in the region!

### The Dubai Expo/2020 ! -- “*The World’s Greatest Show*”

#### ***Expo Theme: CONNECTING MINDS , CREATING THE FUTURE !***

We enjoyed everything about Expo / 2020! First, some background info:

- Many countries in their exhibits and pavilions celebrated the universal human spirit - and how their countries were striving to overcome some of the deep and intractable challenges which our embattled Earth is facing
- We came away concerned about today and tomorrow's challenges, but also ***optimistic about the day after tomorrow!***
- We learned much about our host country, United Arab Emirates and how the UAE is shining a light on the right path forward both for the region, and for the whole world
- Indeed “*We are ready and remain true to our promise of hosting the best Expo Edition yet in its 168-year history!*” – His Highness Sheikh Mohammam bi Rashid Al Maktoum – Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and ruler of Dubai
- We got to visit a lot of places we may never be able to get to!
- We learned about countries on our ‘short list’ to visit
- We connected with many dedicated pavilion staff members manning the various country exhibits, eager to put their countrys' best attributes forward
- There were great concerts – in particular Alicia Keys and Middle Eastern superstars – music and dance can be a great unifying feature for all humans worldwide
- This is the biggest global event ever staged in the Arab world!
- 198 countries participated (WOW!) -- despite Covid
- We visited 99 country pavilions, lots of new places now on our bucket list!
- And...we had free tickets! (Being seniors, woohoo !)
- And...there was fast food, food to grab'n'go, food trucks but ALSO outstanding premium foods prepared by the finest chefs from all continents and corners of the Earth



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World Fairs are a venue to showcase human achievements, the power of imagination, the unity of humankind (what unites and not what divides), and exciting paths forward into the future in every human endeavor. Every country (to greater or lesser extent) follows these general guidelines in their exhibits. There were overarching themes as well: Mobility (humans, ideas and goods/products migration and distribution); Sustainability (living in balance with our good Earth and oceans); and Opportunity enhancement (empowering the potential within each human to positively shape the future). In fact, some of the most striking architectural structures at Expo /2020 were the three pavilions dedicated to these universal themes.

There were also more down-to-Earth objectives for the country pavilions – increase tourism and investment! These objectives entailed showcasing the countries' natural beauty, history, heroes, culture, contributions and achievements, and natural and human resources to raise awareness and interest in the international investment community. We thoroughly enjoyed many of the pavilions and 'scoped out' future travel destinations for our 'golden years'...!!!

To some extent, these objectives can come into conflict – the Brazilian pavilion for example was the worst example we encountered on our sojourn throughExpo / 2020. Brazil emphasized investment opportunities over loftier, humanist objectives – choosing to celebrate Brazil's mining/extractive industries and logging rather than history, culture and human endeavor. As if Expo / 2020 was just another industrial trade show. It is painful to note that mining introduces mercury into the ground water killing vegetation, animals and humans. Logging, clearing of land by deliberately-set forest fires, construction/industrial development and vast land clearing for cattle farming/agriculture is stripping the Amazon rainforest of trees. This is bad news for the world because the Amazon rainforest was a vast carbon sink, clearing the atmosphere of CO<sub>2</sub> and reducing global warming. The Amazon will reach a tipping point soon, beyond which recovery will be impossible. There will be unknowable global consequences to accelerated global warming. If the rainforests become barren wastelands and cattle farms, this will accelerate global warming by reducing the forest's former CO<sub>2</sub> absorption capability. We were quite disappointed by the Brazilian pavilion.

I was very proud of the United States pavilion. Our country did a great job telling our story. The very first exhibit laid it out there...one of the most powerful documents in human history – Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness..." With the background of the Statue of Liberty. This is exactly the kickoff I would have proposed, and I was very proud and pleased that our exhibition commenced and set the stage with that proclamation. The pavilion was indeed a celebration of American life, our contributions to the world community, our earnest



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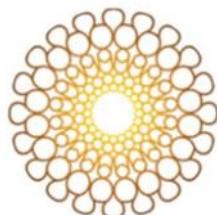


efforts to improve the world, advance sustainability and to be a light shining on the path to better things for all peoples of the world. 47 of our 50 states submitted video sketches of the best things each of these states had to offer and bring forth. (The staff said they were working on the remaining three states to hurry up already!) Some of the staff were various program specialists at the Department of State on six-month detail to Dubai to support the US pavilion. Other young people working there were US college and graduate students studying a variety of subjects; one young man was completing his Masters in Public Policy at Syracuse University and was from our area in Westchester County, NY! We had an animated conversation – he was a fine young man-- and it was nice to speak with an American! Eventually though he was obliged to return to his duties as docent at the US Pavilion, so I let him off the hook and released him to his commitments!

Omicron was just starting to make its appearance while we were at the Expo. However, the Expo was a safe place to be though, because you cannot even enter the Expo without first showing your vaccination card! *Only then can* you present your admission ticket! The Emirati people seemed thoroughly inclined to vaccination; overall vaccination rate was in excess of 95% of those eligible.

Many of the pavilions made a special effort to engage children – our collective future. So yes indeed, Expo / 2020 is definitely a family place. Water is readily available at kiosks everywhere which is a good thing because Dubai is, after all, surrounded to the east, west and south by desert!

For the most current information about Expo / 2020 and pricing alternatives, visit the website at [Expo 2020 Dubai | Home | Connecting Minds, Creating the Future | Expo 2020 Dubai](https://www.expo2020dubai.com/) . I will offer again that if you are transiting through UAE on your way to a dive destination between now and the end of March 2022 – I highly recommend several days in Dubai for both Expo / 2020, touring Abu Dhabi, and.... **Deep Dive Dubai!**



**EXPO  
2020  
DUBAI  
UAE**



## Deep Dive Dubai - Adventure, Scuba Training, Fun... and A Lavish Cornucopia of Subsurface Delights!!



Gary Lehman

In November 2021 my wife and I were in Dubai to enjoy Expo / 2020 ( Dubai's World's Fair, which was covid-delayed from 2020-2021 to 2021-2022). We did all the touristy things in/around Dubai, in addition to going to Expo / 2020 ...and that was all great but...

There was one other thing on MY agenda! Which was to check out, for myself, ***Deep Dive Dubai - which just opened in summer 2021 !!***

OK, so you might have heard bits and pieces about DDD, and are curious about it.

***Listen up diving folks – we all have favorite dive destinations AND THIS SHOULD BE ONE OF THEM!!! (And, hopefully that will be the case after you read this article!)***

I first heard about DDD from our own intrepid Scuba Sports Club explorer Steve Reichenbach. (...I reckoned that if HE was worked up about it, then it must be an amazing place. Which proved to be the case). I checked out the DDD website and could scarcely believe what I was seeing. When the Mrs. indicated an interest in sojourning to Dubai for Expo / 2020, I saw my chance to get to DDD and responded "Ummmm.... let me think about it... (and after about two milliseconds) ...OK, let's GO !!!"

So what are we talking about here? DDD is an up-to-the-second state of the art indoor diving facility – designed by divers, for divers – located just outside the city of Dubai. The objective was to create a diving megacenter where divers at ALL experience levels could TRAIN, PLAY, SKILL BUILD, SOCIALIZE, and HAVE FUN. No effort was spared to make this facility ***top notch in every respect. There is no place like it in the world. Dubai is known for superlative highest top shelf places and experiences, and this one just went to the top of that breathtaking list!***

Even the café (which is called *Equalize*) boasts off-the-Richter-Scale delicious treats & snacks – and has a big display window so that non-diving visitors can enjoy their drinks while watching their friends and family diving and enjoying the underwater structures.

Calling DDD a “pool” is like calling Mt. Everest a “hill”, or a Rolls Royce a “car”. DDD is an open-water, indoor arena/environment/freshwater ecosystem!



## Deep Dive Dubai - Adventure, Scuba Training, Fun... and A Lavish Cornucopia of Subsurface Delights!!



Some “wow” facts:

- 4.6 million liter “pool” (3.9 MILLION gallons)
- SIX Olympic-size swimming pools!
- Every drop of it is fresh water, and *drinkable!* (more on that, see below)
- Dozens of underwater attractions! (more on that below, too)
- Just how DEEP is Deep Dive Dubai? ...How does 60 meters grab you?!
- Will it ever ‘get deeper’? (...Response: a smile...)
- The environment is approximately 30 meters long and 20 meters wide
- Visibility? Umm... How about 60 meters? And water temperature a balmy 30C (around 80F). Leave your 7mm home!
- You liked Dutch Springs!? Well, Dutch is gone now, sooo..... ***DDD or bust!***

I contacted DDD while still in the US to let them know that I was on the way to write a story about this facility. I met our driver Mohammed at the hotel, and we drove about 20 minutes outside of town to the facility campus and grounds. We were greeted and cleared by security before entering DDD. The driveway was long and winding, and intriguing facts about the facility were posted on signposts on the approach – building smiles, suspense and anticipation!

A little background: before oil discoveries transformed the region after WWII, Arabian Gulf coastal communities like Doha (Qatar), Abu Dhabi and Dubai (UAE), and Manama (Bahrain) turned from the desert to the Gulf for sustenance in the form of maritime trade, fishing... and pearls! There was a centuries-long voracious appetite by aristocrats and affluent industrialists all over the world for Arabian Gulf pearls. These were the best pearls in the world, and the rich Gulf oyster beds were farmed for pearls destined for wealthy, upper class women in Europe, America, India, Persia (Iran), and throughout the entire Ottoman Empire. The legacy of pearls and pearl-diving is honored and remembered fondly by old-timers and modern Emirati generations alike who revere their elders and ancestors.

With this background in mind, imagine the wonderous first sight of the facility as you come around that last bend in the long driveway – and catch the first view of DDD! The building resembles a huge, shimmering high-tech oyster! (Proof again that in Dubai, nothing is left to chance or coincidence, and everything is carefully considered -- and best of class! The architecture of downtown Dubai is both startling and energizing, everywhere you look!) The motif of the revered and yet humble oyster which houses DDD invites arriving divers to remember the Gulf’s pearl-industry legacy - and to dive into adventure, fun and learning in the traditions of all those who came before in pearl diving!

After I arrived and was checked in, I was greeted by “Mr. J”, the Director of DDD and Mohab, one of the dive training guides. Mr. J was very generous with his time and proudly conducted ‘cooks



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'tour' of the facility, top to bottom. There was an impressive surprise at every turn! (...I was unable to dive during my visit. Congested from the flight. Discretion is the better part of valor. Next time for absolute sure...)

### What Is Deep Dive Dubai???

DDD is a multi-level underwater urban arena/playground/dive training center -- inviting divers to explore and enjoy the numerous attractions, structures, and intriguing/otherworldly spaces and places! (I remember that Dutch Springs had that mysterious 'stairway to heaven' at around 80ft, evoking a kind of semi-narcosis-like post-apocalyptic vision for divers earning their deep-dive certification.) DDD has some attractions and features like that too, but FUN!

"This is all well and good that this is a deep pool, but it is still just a pool!" – you might be thinking... **Nope.** *For one thing, for certification purposes, this environment actually qualifies as an Open Water body of water!* Yes, got that right. Divers can earn their open water certification at DDD! But it is a pool, so how can that be? One of the many astounding things about DDD is that the *lighting can be changed at will* by adjusting gigantic louvers to adjust the sunlight coming into the pool. *And there are thermoclines. And there even currents since the entire pool is recirculated every six hours!* For these adjustable elements and varying dive conditions, DDD's environment indeed counts as Open Water.

### The Staff, Safety and Training

The staff at DDD are engaging, committed to *teaching diving and divers' safety*, and are all top shelf dive professionals! Divers at DDD feel total confidence in their instructors. All divers are escorted on their tours and training exercises at all times by a divemaster and assistant DM's. There are 56 cameras throughout the environment and the staff in the control center assiduously monitor all the screens. At all times the control room staff knows exactly who is in the water, how long they have been in and when they are due out, what the mission or purpose of their dive is, their certification levels, and which staff members are with that group. Thus, there is an exceptionally high level of situational awareness. Topside instructors have computer monitors to consult to review the skill levels of each of the divers for whom they will be responsible. And underwater wireless communications is in place throughout. Should a safety issue arise, the safety staff (which is continually on standby, ready to go) can be at any point in the environment within two minutes to render assistance.

DDD conducts 'discover scuba', snorkeling and intro-to-freediving classes. These make for terrific family bonding experiences! (Moms, Dads and grandparents, take note!!)... Divers who have been sidelined by covid for a couple of years can also take refresher/reactivation classes... And all of the more advanced classes are taught there as well. Advanced technology classrooms are available for classroom instruction and DDD's meetings with partner organizations. Major certification agencies are represented on the staff (PADI, TDI and GUE-Global Underwater Explorers), enabling divers pursuing various certifications.



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Under special circumstances, DDD also does community outreach, offering Discover Scuba classes to local and ex-pat kids in the area.

Given the sophistication of the diving environment, the question comes up if DDD is ever used for training for law enforcement, public safety or the military dive training. Indeed, it is! Details not forthcoming, for good reasons!

### **FUN --- and Sense of Wonder!**

I have to admit when I first saw some of the underwater landscapes, I thought I was reliving in real life scenes from the video game *Unreal Tournament!* ‘Unreal’ is a good description of what you will see! Like diving through the set of your favorite science fiction / space travel film! Imagine scooting through the underwater urban landscape with a scooter! Or playing chess underwater! Or shooting pool! Imagine getting behind the wheel of a sunken Mercedes! Hopping on a BMW motorcycle (or is it a Motoguzzi?) And for me best of all, having a spirited game of FUSSBALL underwater! There is an underwater sound system! Your underwater experience will be videotaped by the staff - which is good thing, because your friends *won’t believe you!* That way you can relive your experience. And make plans to return, so...Bring it on!

### **Technology and Engineering Marvels!**

The tank filling stations were the first clue as to the high/higher/highest tech in every aspect of this place. They don’t use the familiar ‘partial pressure blending’ air tank filling panels which we normally see at dive centers. Instead, DDD uses an advanced membrane process, a molecular-level sieve to remove nitrogen and make your nitrox and other gases. SAFETY and high volume throughput drives that decision!

*I have to be honest and warn you -- there is a BIG downside to diving at DDD. Which is simply that DDD raises the bar SO HIGH that every other place you will ever dive will fail to live up to the bar set at DDD!*

We toured the engineering spaces of DDD. I have been in the engineering space of a nuclear powerplant (Indian Point in Buchanan, New York) and *NS Savannah* (*Nuclear Ship Savannah*), but those were primitive compared to DDD! *The 14 million liters of fresh water at DDD is filtered thoroughly every six hours! It is clean enough to DRINK! And this is done WITHOUT CHEMICALS. I was staggered to hear this.* The water filtration is accomplished by 1) carefully controlling potential sources of contamination by permitting only DDD gear; 2) high throughput space age high volume Ultra Violet filtration capability and 3) positive pressure capabilities to prevent water table intrusion into the facility’s water. The UV filtration is anti-bacterial and anti-viral, and organic debris is also filtered. To ensure uniform purity of the water, the water is tested weekly from seven different depths throughout the pool. There are six huge pumps



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which could service a major population center pumping the water through the UV filtration. I really wish I had studied engineering to have a better understanding of the technology involved here, but if you do have such a background, you simply have to go there to see it for yourself!

One of the most intriguing features at DDD are the fresh air spaces in the environment. I have heard of this kind of capability for deep divers descending to wrecks like the *RMS Britannic*. If divers wish to get together to pow wow or review the dive or just relax, they can pop up into these spaces, save some air, chat freely, and unwind and shoot the breeze for a while. How cool is that! And of course, DDD has all safety aspects covered: there are sensors in each of these spaces which are monitoring oxygen and carbon dioxide content with automated alerts in the control room in the unlikely event that air quality in these spaces begins to degrade.

### Leadership in the Scuba Diving Community, Advancing Knowledge

DDD stays state-of-the-art in all respects in instruction, gear, process and procedure. Many best practices have been developed in the environment. And DDD's environment lends itself to research on diving and effects on human physiology. A backlog of projects and studies in which DDD collaborates with agencies such as Divers Alert Network/ Europe are on the books for DDD. One of the studies they are advancing which caught my eye relates to measuring decompression stress through an evaluation of heart rate variability (HRV).

The founder of the United Arab Emirates (founded in 1972) was Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, who unified local Emirs to common cause and thus founded the UAE. Besides his humanist passion for advancing social justice throughout the region and expanding opportunities and wellbeing for the people of the UAE, Sheikh Zayed was an ardent environmentalist. This spirit continues to this day with world-class environmental activism – especially in the marine world of the Arabian Gulf. His spirit of activism drove the establishment of the Middle East's largest aquarium – the National Aquarium, located in nearby Abu Dhabi with many world-class environmental initiatives. Today's UAE Crown Prince of Dubai – Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum - continues and supports these projects. *And, Sheikh Maktoum is also an avid diver, and endorses the diving education and environmental programs of Deep Dive Dubai!*

There are a lot of amazing folks out there who are divers (including YOU!) But a parade of actors, luminaries, and personalities who enjoy scuba diving are frequent visitors to DDD and will return time and again. After all, to fully enjoy and explore the environment, and take in an underwater chess or backgammon challenge, it will take at least four or five dives to start to get to know your way around! So, if you see Will Smith or another actor or rock star while diving at DDD, a cheerful but discrete greeting will be perfectly appreciated!



## Deep Dive Dubai - Adventure, Scuba Training, Fun... and A Lavish Cornucopia of Subsurface Delights!!



Safety is always *numero uno* for DDD. During dive planning, divers are assessed based *not only* on their "C"-card, but wisely, also the *recency* of their diving experiences. This will determine which sections of the environment they are eligible to dive. Open water divers are limited to 20 meters, and advanced to 30 meters. Qualified trimix/technical divers are good to go the distance down to 60 meters.

DDD is one of the major dive center hubs for GUE / Global Underwater Explorers. GUE is a major contributor to dive education and ocean conservation initiatives and oversees a supporting matrix of the world's leading dive operators and organizations. Countries included in the matrix are United Arab Emirates; Germany; Australia; Netherlands; Florida, Texas, California and Alaska in the US; Singapore; Malaysia; Canada; Italy; China; Sweden; Switzerland; South Korea; Mexico; Bonaire; Belgium; Spain; Egypt; The Philippines, Croatia, and Hong Kong.

Verily, the sun never sets on the GUE matrix. Everything important going on in the world of diving intersects with GUE -- which means DDD is and remains state-of-the-art and in a unique leadership position.

### Recompression, Anyone?

A visitor to DDD could be forgiven for mistaking DDD's recompression chamber for a modern A380 Business or First-Class passenger lounge! The seats looked so luxurious that they almost invited a diver to go get decompression illness -- just for a ride in those seats! There are 12 of these seats in there ... and 2 for the medical staff... there is even an en suite facility! Yes, if nature calls, we're not taking buckets or holding it in. There is a pressurized bathroom with its own door for privacy – right there in the recompression chamber suite! I have never thought about this problem, and I bet this is one of the only – if not THE only – recompression chamber boasting an en suite facility! The recompression chamber is also available for use by law enforcement, public safety and the military if ever needed.

### Can You Bring Your Own Gear?

Since many visiting divers will be transiting through Dubai on their way to other dive destinations like Oman, Seychelles and Maldives among others, this might suggest using your own gear while diving DDD. This is not permitted however, due to the potential for contamination of the DDD water by unknown substances and chemicals which might be in personal gear brought in by divers. On the other hand, advanced training for closed-circuit is available at DDD. Given the advisability of training with the same closed-circuit gear which will be used diving to build familiarity and fluency, DDD may make an exception and permit personal closed-circuit gear to be used. This mitigates risks associated with using closed-circuit gear with which the diver is unfamiliar. So, you will be using the Deep Dive Dubai wetsuits and gear. DDD uses state-of-the-art biocide Virkon, a broad-spectrum disinfectant which eliminates all kinds of viruses, bacteria and other bad stuff. Your gear will be squeaky clean to a subatomic particle level!



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*Look at you! Modeling in your cool, snazzy custom gear – and with that revered DDD logo! (... And remember to save some pocket money for the dive shop gear, I did!)*

It isn't needed but if you prefer to bring your own personal items i.e. mask and regulator that is permitted. I guarantee there are no mantis shrimp crouching in little coral hideaways and no manta ray flybys. **For the Pac-Man consoles, pool table and post-apocalyptic urban dreamscapes, you CAN however, use your own camera gear!**

### What About Overhead Confined Space Diving?

There are also partial confined space/ overhead environment spaces at DDD, where direct vertical access to open water is not present. These partial confined spaces provide skill building, confidence building and ways'n'means practice for divers seeking overhead environment certification. When you layer on top of these partial confined spaces the added complexities of currents and variable low lighting, these spaces can become challenging and helpful for training. However, despite that - no overhead environment certifications are available at DDD at this time, because the spaces are not sufficiently complex (limited size and number of ingress/egress features would be required. And this is totally aligned with DDD's absolute, resolute commitment to total diver safety.)

### Our Recap -- Our Surface Interval

We threw a lot at you here in this article, but the takeaways are the fun and adventure at DDD; the training at all levels which you get with the best instructors in the industry; you will be helping advance marine conservation and supporting research around human physiology at this advanced dive center; you will make new friends; you will be protected by the relentless commitment to dive safety by the entire DDD staff --- *and you may never forget the amazing lattes at Equalize!* (Remember though, if you have dived at DDD, just don't go to top of Burj Khalifa at 2700'+ after diving at DDD, please!) **MAKE YOUR RESERVATIONS <https://deepdivedubai.com/>, Go soon, Go early, Go often, and Have a great time --- and let me see the video when you get back!**



## Deep Dive Dubai - Adventure, Scuba Training, Fun... and A Lavish Cornucopia of Subsurface Delights!!



(All photos courtesy Deep Dive Dubai)



## Featured Creature — The LIONFISH

Gary Lehman



It is a melancholy task to pen this article in this space for this issue, for we all know that this used to be our friend Rick D'Amico's column. Going forward, there will be an empty seat in Sea Swells table - which used to be Rick's seat. RIP Rick – nobody even comes close.

In this issue, we have had some interesting reading involving LIONFISH! So, we thought it would be worthwhile to take a closer look at this species and see what we can find out!

Some fish eat plants and algae, some eat other fish. Lionfish are very definitely in the latter category! They devour the fry (baby fish) of other species. Lionfish originated in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. Their population is held in check in the Indian and Pacific oceans because there are natural predators to the lionfish. There are no natural predators in the Caribbean to keep the voracious lionfish populations under control. Divers will hunt them with spear-guns, but truthfully this is just a drop in the bucket. It might make people feel good, like they are making a difference, but that is illusory. Divers are limited in depth and time underwater, so they can only spear and eliminate minuscule numbers of lionfish populations. And those of us who have been diving for a while actually can see the decline over time in other fish due to lionfish's appetites. Parrotfish eat the algae covering coral reefs; but lionfish are reducing the numbers of parrotfish which in turn means degraded coral reefs.

Yes, it is bad... it seems for now at least to be a death spiral for the Caribbean... Let's pray that somehow the lionfish don't attack the native species off Cuba.

Female lionfish reproduce prolifically, releasing up to two million eggs a year which drift around, extending the lionfish reach and range of habitat. And as we have seen, they have poisonous spines which deter predations on lionfish by other larger species. This poison is no laughing matter. Pain, swelling and breathing difficulties can last for days, and in bad cases, even paralysis can result.

They are pretty to look at, sure enough – with dorsal and pectoral fins and spines. They have been very popular aquarium choices.

How did they get here? Perhaps they were stowaways in the bilge water of containerships. Perhaps they were brought here as ornamental fish. Perhaps they were



### USS Lionfish SS-298

Museum ship located at Battleship Cove, Fall River, Massachusetts.

Museum also has USS Massachusetts (battleship) Former East German missile corvette Hiddensee, The PT Boat Museum & USS Joseph P. Kennedy DD-850 (destroyer) which participated in the Cuban Missile Crisis. All Aboard ! Haze Gray and Underway!



## Featured Creature ...The LIONFISH

Gary Lehman



flushed down the toilet and wound up surviving and thriving. It doesn't matter. They are here, and they are bad news.

How do we get rid of them? There have been many suggestions. One which I have always thought would be interesting is to train (and reward) dolphins to collect them in steelsac nets or bags, and then have the dolphin return the bags to surface tenders where they would be rewarded. This would get around the problem of humans not being able to get down to 700' (lionfish exist that deep) and also of course gets around decompression and air supply limitations. An added advantage of this approach is that the lionfish can be harvested for FOOD for local populations and/or well-heeled tourists like us – who may jump at the chance to... "get even, eat a lionfish"... Perhaps someone will work on that. I certainly prefer that solution for dolphins than training them to place explosives on enemy ships...

Time will tell as to innovative solutions to reduce the lionfish threat. In the meantime, there are recipes so let us get even and eat as many of them as we can!



Photo courtesy NOAA / National Ocean Service



Jack Ricotta spearing lionfish

## Let's Eat !

I have eaten lionfish and it tastes like grouper and may be also like mahi-mahi – although firmer texture than the latter and as flaky (or moreso) than grouper. It is delicious. Great eating! And supports the local fishermen and economies. Lots of Caribbean restaurants

serve it. I don't know if you can find it in supermarkets in the Caribbean. I have never looked for it there. But if I found it, I would lightly coat the filets with flour, then gently sautee with GARLIC (of course!), sea salt and butter, maybe just three minutes medium heat or so (you will figure that part out yourself, don't over cook it...) and keep it simple and delicious. Of course, if you are so inclined, you kick it up a notch with Franks Red Hot, or some Old Bay seasoning or even Jamaican jerk seasoning. It is all good. There are plenty of lionfish recipe books out there on

Amazon. OK, like that is it, this is just making me hungry.

***Pass me the fish, a Red Stripe, rice and beans , and johnny cake please!***

# And Around The Dive Shop.....

## LOCAL DIVE SHOPS.....AT YOUR SERVICE!

*Looking for dive-related gifts? Need to upgrade your gear?*

*Here is a list of shops that may just have the right one for your best dive buddy or for yourself!*

 <p><b>Ski and Scuba Connection</b> 26 Saint Roch Ave Greenwich, CT 06830 Tel. 203-629-4766 <a href="http://www.skiandscubaconnection.com">www.skiandscubaconnection.com</a></p>	 <p><b>SCUBA NEW YORK</b> 2037 Central Park Ave Yonkers, NY 10710 Tel. 914-779-2966 and 2672 Gerritsen Ave Brooklyn, NY 11229 Tel. 718-769-0099 <a href="http://www.scubany.com">www.scubany.com</a></p>
 <p><b>Abyss Scuba</b> Where the fun begins! <a href="http://www.abyss-scuba.net">www.abyss-scuba.net</a> (914) 244-3483 29 Marble Avenue, Pleasantville, NY 10570</p>	 <p><b>Captain Mike's Diving School</b> 530 City Island Ave City Island, NY 10464 Tel. 718-885-1588 <a href="http://www.captainmikesdiving.com">www.captainmikesdiving.com</a></p>
 <p><b>Oceanblue</b> Over the Adventure <b>DIVE CENTER</b></p>	 <p><b>Oceanblue Dive</b> 108 Bedford Street Stamford, CT, 06901 <a href="http://www.oceanbluedive.com">www.oceanbluedive.com</a></p>



[www.divenewsnetwork.com](http://www.divenewsnetwork.com) or [www.scubah2omag.com](http://www.scubah2omag.com)