

Dive

By Gary Ryman

Put on a fancy black vest, load the pockets with ten or twelve pounds of lead sacks, and jump into a lake. Not something we think of doing on a regular basis, if at all, it is one that a growing number of folks do locally. Kidding aside, the weight is an integral part of the equipment Scuba divers use to maintain neutral buoyancy while wearing their breathing air tank, wet suit, and other associated equipment.

Learning to dive is easy, enjoyable, and something that can be done at any age. Local Dive Shop owner and Instructor, Joe Stude, of the Outdoor Sports Shop in Greenfield Township, began diving as soon as he could drive and became certified to teach divers in 1979. He has taught students from fifteen to over sixty years of age.

Another diver, Fred Bales, tried diving for the first time on his honeymoon and instantly fell in love. He and his wife, Leigh, turned that trip into a dive excursion and gained their initial certifications before returning home. Five years and over 350 dives later, Bales is also a certified instructor.

People enjoy diving for a variety of reasons. Stude enjoys the adventure, not danger or risk taking, but the thrill of finding or seeing something new or different underwater. This explains his favorite type of outing; wreck diving off the New Jersey coast.

Bales enjoys the serenity of the underwater environment. "The idea of floating along in the water, somewhat weightless, is very tranquil and refreshing," he said. One might think it is quiet underwater, but Bales is quick to note, "The underwater world is full of sounds, but it's very calming sound." He also enjoys the sights. "To find yourself swimming along, surrounded by an uncountable number of blue tang is just sensory overload."

Learning the basics can be done at your own pace. There are academics which can be done in a traditional classroom setting or now, more commonly, on line with interaction from the instructor. "There are a lot of different agencies," Bales noted, "but they all have a core approach." He explained, "You learn the science of diving and the equipment. Then you transition to a confined water environment such as a pool to learn the basics. Once we develop a set of skills in confined water, which will allow us to dive safely, we will transition to open water, taking those same skills and reapplying them in an environment in which we can change our depth." The basic training will typically run from four to five hundred dollars but, as Bales noted, can be done in stages. Equipment can be purchased in stages as well, or rented. "The cost for equipment will vary based on the type you want, the environment you want to dive in, etc.," Bales said.

One local dive venue receives high marks from both Stude and Bales. Dutch Springs, located near Bethlehem, is a fifty-acre spring fed lake, filtered through limestone, producing outstanding underwater visibility. There are attractions such as aircraft and various types of vehicles such as a school bus and fire truck submerged at depths of up to one hundred feet.

"The best overall diving around here is Dutch Springs,"

Stude said. Bales agrees, emphasizing the family atmosphere and camping facilities. Both dive here numerous times every year along with friends and family. They also enjoy wreck diving off the New Jersey coast. "The New Jersey shore from New York City down is riddled with shipwrecks," Bales said. The St. Lawrence River is also popular and not as cold as might be anticipated. "Because it is top water off the Great Lakes, you can have warm consistent temperatures as deep as ninety feet," he said.

Dive trips to more remote, and exotic locales are also arranged by Bales under the auspices of the Outdoor Sports Shop. Mexico, Honduras, and various spots in the Caribbean have been recent destinations. "To go from thirty to eighty degrees in five hours is wonderful," said Bales. "The worst part about diving is coming home."

Both also enjoy even closer dives in area lakes as well. Stude noted that these may not have the visibility of Dutch Springs or the Caribbean, but they are close and can be a great deal of fun. A hockey stick he found at the bottom of Newton Lake, five minutes from his dive shop, hangs prominently on the wall.

Diving is an environmentally conscious sport. Not damaging coral reefs or similar ocean life is standard practice. This extends to local lakes as well. Bales noted, "One of the things we're hoping to do this year is get a group of our local recreational divers together and go to a local lake and clean up their underwater beach. We did a little bit of Newton Lake last year. We picked up stuff that has fallen out of boats or people have cast overboard."

Divers give back to the community in a more critical fashion as well. Local Dive and Swiftwater Rescue teams are drawn from these folks. "If you look at their history, most of these started with a couple of recreational divers who wanted to help their community, and it grows from there," Bales said. Bill White, Training Officer of the Scott Township Dive Rescue Specialists, agrees, having started as a recreational diver himself. White has had heart-breaking experiences on emergency calls, but sees it as an important and needed service. The Dive Team, he noted, also has done underwater clean ups, for example, at Aylesworth Park in Jermyn. This not only helps the underwater environment, but provides training and practice for the divers.

You don't have to be a great swimmer to learn to dive. Bales emphasizes he was far from a "water person" when he started. The underwater world is one that most of us have never seen except on television or the movies. Visiting it in person is easier than ever before. Consider giving it a try.



Resources

The Outdoor Sports Shop- Route 247 in Greenfield Township just north of Finch Hill corners. You can reach them at 570-222-2501 or via e-mail at info@outdoorsportsshop.com. For more information, go to www.outdoorsportsshop.com.

DIVE TRAINING:

Fred Bales- 570-281-3845 or via e-mail at like-da-fish@echoes.net. More information is also available at <http://www.like-da-fish.com>.

Middletown Scuba- 17 Dolson Avenue in Middletown, NY. They can be reached at 845-343-2858, and for further information go to www.middletownscuba.com.

Blue Ocean Divers- 1500 Vestal Parkway East, Suite 103A, in Vestal, New York. Their phone number is 607-757-2930, and website information is at www.blueoceandivers.com.

Inland Water Sports- 163 West Union Street, Kingston, PA and can be reached at 570-288-3999.

DIVE ADVENTURE:

Dutch Springs- 4733 Hanoverville Road, Bethlehem, PA 18020, and can be reached at 610-759-2270. For additional information, go to www.duchsprings.com.