



For Immediate Release

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Adaptive Diving: Training Agencies Come Together to Discuss Growing Community of Adaptive Divers

Dive centers, operators, resorts, really the whole dive industry is now challenged to meet the needs and desires of a growing adaptive diving community, welcoming them to a very adaptable sport while also addressing standards and safety. In a ground-breaking seminar sponsored by the Diving Equipment and Manufacturing Association (DEMA), representatives Mark Slingo, Disabled Divers International (DDI), Mark Rausch, Handicapped Scuba Association (HSA), Barbara Thompson, Rebreather Association of International Divers (RAID), Thomas Powell, Scuba Diving International (SDI), Charley Oxley, Scuba Schools International (SSI) and Jim Gunderson, National Association of Underwater Instructors (NAUI) sat down to discuss the similarities and differences in approach moderated by the Dive Pirates Foundation.

"We organized this panel and we can't thank DEMA enough for accepting this as one of their sponsored seminars during this conference as we as a foundation are working with all of these agencies to provide quality training for adaptive divers and we rely on all of them for guidance and leadership in this niche of the diving community," explained Sophie Wimberley, Dive Pirates President and co-moderator of the panel discussion. "Networking with dive centers across the US we are looking for adaptive diving instructors who will also accept what we have developed as safe diving procedures for our recipients and we welcome their feedback and involvement as there are many unknowns, such as depth, long term effects verses short term benefits, networking with the medical community that truly understand the health requirements needed for safe diving, and more."

Cognitive Conditions

One topic explored during the panel included how each agency addresses divers with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injuries, autism and other cognitive conditions.

"The key is having a very frank discussion with the student diver and making sure you get honest answers to what are the person's triggers, how does he or she responds to those triggers, and what might cause that trigger under water," said Mark Rausch with HSA. "Then together we make an action plan of how to minimize creating that situation, but realistically how to handle it should it occur for the safety of the whole buddy team."

Tribal Knowledge

All participants acknowledged no amount of experience can prepare you for every adaptive diver's need, and training affiliations evaporate when you reach out to fellow divers who may be able to trouble-shoot an adaptive diver's unique issues.

"It's the tribal knowledge of divers, we are one of the most welcoming recreational sports out there, and we all love sharing the experience with newcomers, that's why we are here, so when it comes to getting someone in the water, we rely on our personal networks, regardless of affiliation," said Mark Slingo with DDI.

Rosemary Kidd, who started Kidd Scuba and hopes to expand her business with the adaptive community, listened in. "I'm a new instructor with NAUI, went on and became an HSA instructor, because I'm an occupational therapist, I can rehab, and I want to get the disabled diving population built up," Kidd said. "So just to see this at DEMA was fabulous, and there's lots of issues we need to keep discussing but it gave me new stuff to think about so we can keep it going!"

Dive Operators

Questions raised by the audience sparked a lively discussion about the concerns dive operators are faced with... the certification card and the validity of the diver's ability and needs. Many divers certified before a debilitating illness or accident do not circle back to an instructor or dive center to re-evaluate their status as an open water diver, and the operator is faced with the dilemma of wanting to provide for the customer and advocating for his or her ability to dive while also managing the safety of the diver and buddies as well as limiting themselves of any liability.

"I still think the biggest weakness that exists was not the people that were in there, the various agencies and the people that attended, but the people did not attend. They're the ones that somehow have to overcome their liability concerns," said Mark Dugger of Midwest School of Diving in White Bear Lake, Minnesota. "These are divers, no different than anyone else, once they get under the water, you have to overcome that and more importantly get a lot of the resorts and dive operators around the world to understand that there are another group of divers that can dive in a safe manner as long as the standards are followed."

All agreed this is a concern that needs to be addressed and many suggested a follow up panel including dive operators to better understand how training agencies and operators can work together to encourage adaptive divers be re-assessed and how to network with each other when questions arise.

Wimberley added, "we are already formulating the next panel discussion for next year, as this was just the beginning of coming to the table and sharing information to grow this community in the safest way possible."

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