Summer of the Reef

Welcome to the September edition of SCUBA & H2O Adventure Magazine. We have jammed packed this edition with lots of stories about what the scuba diving community is doing all over the country to impact those who share the water resources with us.

This summer has been busy. While it seemed to get off to a late start, it has certainly finished with a bang — literally, a bang as divers descended on newly christened artificial reefs. It has been amazing to see so much work done to benefit the dive community, fisherman, and the fish themselves. It is truly impressive team work to see what these communities have accomplished. We extend our sincere congratulations to all these communities who worked so hard to survive through this tough economy and also provided their community with lasting infrastructure development. Here is a brief recap of the summer’s achievements;

In Pensacola, Florida, dive leaders Lila Harris, Vince Lucido, Gary Emmerson, and many others are working with David Walter of Walter Marine to continue to expand Poseidon’s playground while celebrating the 10 year anniversary of the Oriskany, the world’s largest artificial reef. See our story, New Pensacola Vessel Benefits Consumers and Community highlighting the history of this important milestone while emphasizing the incredible collaborative work within the community.

In July, the City of Palm Beach deployed the Ana Celia, a 174 ft. 624 ton former drug smuggling vessel to add to it substantial artificial reef program. Community leaders like Jena McNeal, Dan Bates, Bill Walker, and many others continue to dedicate their time and money in developing sustainable reef systems. See our story, From Smuggling to Submersion Vessel Takes on New Life as PBC Reefs.

Later in July the City of Pompano Beach sank the 324 ft. Lady Luck as the center piece in Shipwreck Park, a little over a mile off the city’s center. City leaders Greg Harrison, Jeff Torode, Tommy DiGiorgio, and many others worked on this important project. In a true community effort the City worked with Scuba Nation to promote the sinking nationally, bringing attention to their community. See our story, Pompano Beach Celebrates Good Fortune with Lady Luck.

Not to be outdone, North Carolina, the shipwreck graveyard of the Atlantic, fueling their addiction to diving, the Eastern Carolina Artificial Reef Association (ECARA) sank the James L Francesconi, 12 miles off the Beaufort Inlet. Working tirelessly, community leaders, Bobby Purifoy, Jason Peters, Debby Boyce, and many others worked with Fisherman from the Blue Marlin Fishing Tournament among others to raise funds to complete the sinking. See our story, North Carolina: Working Together to Fuel and Addiction on this important project.

These are just a few of the accomplishments of this summer. The dive industry is partnering with other like-minded user groups; fisherman, eco environmentalists, government agencies, and marine enthusiasts to create habitat, dive sites, and even jobs. Congratulations to all!
The Opening of Secret Beach

New York’s Long Island boasts over 400 miles of coastline. Along its southern facing shores, the Atlantic Ocean waves have created spectacular sandy beaches while the northern shores are rockier, a result of the geological forces which created the island some 21,000 years ago. Sadly, for SCUBA divers, virtually all of this diverse shoreline is off-limits. A patchwork of private ownership, town and resident-only beaches and state parks with restrictions and prohibitions on diving serves to deny divers access to some of the island’s rich and diverse ecosystems.

The Long Island Divers Association (LIDA) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit regional organization dedicated to the promotion of local diving, the representation of divers’ interests throughout the diving and general community, and the protection of diving rights through outreach to local and regional government officials. In 2019, LIDA achieved a significant success in its mission to protect divers’ access rights by working closely with the Village of Greenvale to secure access to Clarke’s Beach for SCUBA diving.

The Village of Greenvale is located on the “north fork” of Long Island’s east end, and within its borders lies a stretch of pristine shoreline called Clarke’s Beach. Years ago, divers would come from all across the region to dive the waves of this beach, dubbing the site “Secret Beach”. Because of its relatively hidden location and the lack of a formal access road and parking lot at the site, the “legend of Secret Beach” grew amongst divers who enjoyed the rocky marine environments off the shore. However, a number of years ago, the Village government locked down the beach and divers were prohibited from entering the site. For divers, it was yet another dive site that was taken off their list of available places to dive.

For several years, the site remained off-limits, with a chain dropped across the single dirt road used to get to the water. The site was not being used, not being maintained and only those who chose to trespass were benefiting from the location. For divers who knew and loved “Secret Beach”, the chain across the road was a symbol of the continued loss of shoreline access on Long Island. The once great dive site was now tantalizing close but off limits for divers. This year, LIDA began working closely with the Village of Greenvale officials to advocate for re-opening the site for divers. LIDA President Barry Lepol and other officers and members of LIDA met with Village officials on several occasions, making the case that divers using the site would do so responsibly and would commit to leaving the beach in better shape than before they used it. After several negotiations, the Village agreed to allow diving at the site on Sat and one weekend per month during the dive season. This was a small victory for divers and access rights on Long Island.

On July 23 and 24, with the help of Hampton Dive Center who assisted in securing insurance, logistics and access control, “Secret Beach” was once again re-opened to the SCUBA Diving public. About 100 divers enjoyed diving the rocky shoreline over the two days. In addition to a beach barbecue, members from cooperating local dive clubs such as Hampton Dive Center, The NYC Sea Gypses, The Dive Club, and Long Island Network Divers, as well as many others, participated in a beach cleanup of the site, removing 7 large trash bags of litter from the beach. Underwater, divers explored a pristine north shore ecosystem, with depths dropping to 30 feet or so and marine life in abundance. All those in attendance were clearly grateful for the renewed ability to dive the legendary “Secret Beach”.

LIDA has arranged for additional dives in the future and, for now, SCUBA diving access to “Secret Beach” seems to be preserved, a testament to the hard work and tenacity of the LIDA organization, and an example of how divers, dive shops and dive associations can work with local government to achieve mutually beneficial goals.

For more information on LIDA, visit www.lidainc.org

For more information on Hampton Dive Center, visit www.haptondivedivecenter.com

Divers prepare for their dive at “Secret Beach”