

June 2011

S.T.A.R.S.

International Newsletter



SeaSigns Specialty



SeaSigns founder, Suzanne Kiffman of Florida, graciously provided her underwater sign language product to use in the **S.T.A.R.S.** program about 6 years ago, and it has been a hit from day one! The broad range of signs introduced augment the basic signs included in the open water program and enhance both the safety and enjoyment of each dive. Our top priority is safety, and SeaSigns enables our teen participants with the flexibility to easily convey questions, concerns, and excitement to their staff and dive buddies. Currently participants are working to master the first 100+ signs in the base SeaSigns curriculum which are an extract from American Sign Language. Learning and implementing these signs will entitle each **S.T.A.R.S.** participant with their first specialty following the open water dives. This is truly a sign of some great diving to come!

S.T.A.R.S. Bring-A-Friend

On June 11th, all **S.T.A.R.S.** participants were offered the unique opportunity to bring a friend, relative, or peer into the pool for a Discover Scuba session following class to see what was changing their lives. The group included 6 youth and one adult who has been following the progress of the **S.T.A.R.S.** program and was interested in learning more. It was recommended that interested participants see our local partners at Manta Divers, Inc. for more information about summer lessons while the **S.T.A.R.S.** participants are enjoying their numerous summer dive events.



Shaping up with S.T.A.R.S.

At the onset of the 2011 **S.T.A.R.S.** program all participants were evaluated to determine their level of fitness before the program activities transformed them into Lean, Mean, Diving Machines. The second milestone in this process is the last week of June when participants will once again be evaluated to see the changes in

their abilities following 12 weeks of gut busting by lead fitness instructors, AJ and Ismael. It would be an understatement to say the boys are fully aware of the physical changes to their bodies with the bi-weekly workout sessions. The senior staff expects some really impressive metric changes in just two weeks, so stay tuned for sound, heart-pounding fitness improvements!

Staff Member of the Month - Jeff Kessler "Coach"

Jeff Kessler has lived in Kenosha his entire life and even played sports in youth programs as he grew up. The natural next step was for Jeff to begin coaching, including an adult softball team. Jeff has been actively coaching kids for about 15 years in the sports of baseball, softball, football, and hockey. Jeff admits that hockey was the only sport where 12 year olds were better than he was personally when he grew up. Jeff is also a pet lover with 2 cats, a parrot, and both a 55 and 75 gallon aquarium. He is also searching for another dog (golden retriever) to add to the herd.

Jeff is a certified diver but didn't get involved with the **S.T.A.R.S.** program to dive. Rather he felt that he could contribute best on the surface. He was interested to see how this program worked and is very glad he did. Jeff hopes that the **S.T.A.R.S.** program and the committed group of volunteers in Kenosha carries on into 2012 so that he may continue his volunteer work. Jeff sees a promising future for **S.T.A.R.S.** in the city of Kenosha, and he hopes to continue his involvement in the future.



Underwater Competition - June 25th

ON YOUR MARK, GET READY, SET, GO!!!! ... to the second annual S.T.A.R.S. International Underwater Competition Invitational! This event is planned for the Mary E. Bradford High School pool on June 25th at 9:00 am. This is the only spectator event of the season which will pit our finely tuned **S.T.A.R.S.** divers' skills against one another and two mystery teams. Yes, it was an invitational event that will bring back some graduates from the 2010 program in Illinois and a second group of graduates spanning

2005-2006 who will cross the Wisconsin state line to take on our ambitious Kenosha divers.

The 7-8 events planned will be an immense amount of fun intended to show the divers how well they stand up against our graduates while bonding all the youth for a summer of combined diving. In next month's newsletter, look for photos and finishes... and maybe even some "photo finishes".

Ana Medina - SDI Instructor Training

Only 5 short years ago, a young **S.T.A.R.S.** hopeful struggling to fit into her middle school in suburban Illinois, took the first step towards broadening the opportunities in her future. Within a year, Ana stepped easily into the role of **S.T.A.R.S.** mentor for the subsequent year's program and actively engaged participants and parents alike. At the conclusion of the next two years, Ana was awarded with the coveted "Mentor of the Year" award for her

positive contributions to the program. In 2010, Ana completed her first SDI Pro certification as she set her sights on a senior level position in **S.T.A.R.S.** after she finishes her business degree from Illinois University. The summer of 2011 promises to be Ana's biggest challenge as she begins a new adventure in the SDI Instructor program with the Illinois Institute of Diving. We have her instructor stool under construction, and we wish her well.

"Only those who dare to fail greatly can ever achieve greatly."



Summer Diving Plans

Summer diving for the Kenosha **S.T.A.R.S.** begins on July 18th at Pearl Lake in South Beloit. The group and instructors will return to the Pearl Lake facility completing their open water certifications and 3 specialties during the week thus advancing their skills to become more self-reliant divers. Following this intensive week of diving, the group will change focus to complete First Aid, CPR, AED, and Oxygen training and then enjoy a fun day of diving at the end of July at Haigh Quarry.

During mid-August the group will return to Pearl to complete a Night Diving specialty then begin studies to complete their Rescue Diver certification in September. By October they will complete their final specialty and be dubbed Advanced Open water divers before their program graduation ceremony. It will be a wild summer leaving the kids primed for more diving in 2012. We encourage all the participants to jump in and go for the deep rewards the program can bring!

S.T.A.R.S. Divemaster Moves to the Front of the Class

Michael Johnson joined the **S.T.A.R.S.** International legion of volunteers in February of 2010 after achieving his PADI Rescue Diver certification in sunny Florida. To Kevin, Michael showed genuine interest, dedication, and commitment soon after joining **S.T.A.R.S.**, and he soon opted to begin the SDI Divemaster program through the volunteer training program offered within **S.T.A.R.S.** Fast forward to a year later and Michael began to visualize the opportunities on the horizon of taking the next step in his dive training, Instructor certification. Following a few minor challenges and a detour in pursuing an SDI Instructor certification, Michael decided the best route for him would be to select the competing PADI Instructor Development course and examination to become dual certified. Michael chose the tropical venue of Boca Raton, Florida and completed his IDC with the veteran instructor James Weber. Upon beginning his training, Michael realize he had a real advantage over other instructor candidates in the class because of all the time he had spent volunteering with **S.T.A.R.S.** Michael admits that the experience of watching student divers work through problems taught him to anticipate the difficulties and know how to best help them succeed at becoming scuba divers. Michael now encourages anyone interested in expanding their dive knowledge to volunteer with **S.T.A.R.S.** for the experience and personal rewards it provides.

Michael completed his instructor training with James who he found to be an overall fantastic instructor. Michael learned that James has been diving for 35 years beginning at just age seven, and now dives professionally for the Palm Beach Fire Department. To become a PADI scuba instructor, you must also be certified to teach CPR and Emergency First Aid for Children and Adults which immediately broadened Michael's teaching flexibility and knowledge. But the real collateral benefit of learning CPR and EFR from James (who responds to emergencies as a paramedic as well as a professional rescue diver) is the authentic perspective he brings to the training.





**“Today’s preparation
determines tomorrow’s
achievement.”**



Photos from “Bring-a-Friend” Event

“Try Scuba” To Instructor, a Diver’s Journey

By: Michael Johnson

From the moment my knees first touched the sandy bottom of the ocean floor in Cozumel, Mexico, I knew that scuba diving was for me. I knew I had to do whatever it took for me to spend more time underwater. I deeply desired to float weightlessly on the gentle currents, like an eagle on the thermoclines of a summer day. My diving experience began with a PADI “Try Scuba Experience” then fast forward three and a half years to today. I am now certified to teach others so they too can enjoy the incredible experience of Scuba Diving.

On Sunday, June 19, 2011, I passed the PADI Instructors Examination (IE) which entitled me to independently teach others to scuba dive. The journey was filled with incredibly fun experiences; it has taken me to places I otherwise would never have visited. I have been fortunate to have met many wonderful people who have become lifelong friends.

Dive—Dive—Dive was my calling every day at training. Boat dive off the coast of Palm Beach, Florida and you will quickly learn to love hearing those words shouted from the captain’s chair high above the boat deck. The words mean that it’s time to GET IN THE WATER, drop effortlessly toward the ocean floor, and drift weightlessly for the next 45 minutes scanning the bottom for sting ray, eels, lobster, and if you’re lucky catch a glimpse of a passing shark.

Becoming a scuba instructor means that you have to dive, dive, dive. You must have logged at least 100 dives in a lake, quarry, or the ocean to accept the upgraded credentials. My first open water dive was logged on January 29, 2009 while in Cozumel, Mexico with Mesito Divers and my instructor was Freddie Contreras. Freddie is a true gentleman and his teaching style sticks with me to this day. He is kind, patient, and makes learning FUN. Any time someone tells me that they are going to Cozumel to learn to dive or just to dive for fun, I tell them to contact Freddie. I plan to model much of how I teach from Freddie’s style because my definition of a good instructor is someone who wants to see their students succeed, and I hope that lasts a lifetime for my recent efforts.