

August 2011



S.T.A.R.S. International Newsletter

Flashback

By Ann Paulsen

Why do we become divers? Many reasons, right. But how many of us take the plunge with a single goal in mind: laser focused on self-improvement?

The **S.T.A.R.S.** program is for kids who are unlikely to have access to Experiential Learning. With each new year, staffers look to provide the **S.T.A.R.S.** model of self-improvement and mentoring to young people with ever more challenging personal histories.

S.T.A.R.S. is by no means a summer camp. The program has its limitations,

and no one solution fits every situation. It best suits kids ages 13-18 who lack guidance and who may be vulnerable to gang influence. These are young people who rely on survival instincts to get through each day, sometimes feeling discarded and forgotten. Most of these children see high school as a virtual minefield.

Although attrition was significant this year from 60 candidates, it goes without saying that participants in the graduating class of **S.T.A.R.S.** readily illustrate the collateral benefits of the program.

2010 YMCA Collaboration...Drum Roll Please

S.T.A.R.S. International takes another step forward towards a broad collaboration with the Des Plaines YMCA in 2012. A second executive level presentation was provided by the **S.T.A.R.S.** Board of Directors to the YMCA Director on

August 18th which was well received. The program is clearly perceived as a solid program with potential to provide the YMCA with a comprehensive program for its families with at-risk youth. An announcement is due in early September.





Graduate Advisory Board Members

Ana Lilia Medina	2005
Jorge Galvan	2010
Javier Araiza	2011
Matt Mursewick	2008
Jesse Chavez	2005

Graduates Taking the Helm

The “**S.T.A.R.S.** International Graduate Advisory Board” premieres in September. Advisory Board members were hand selected to best provide constructive student leadership to the program. The new team was assembled with a dual purpose in mind; First, gain first hand experience/input from graduates on the future design, direction, and leadership of the program. Second; groom graduates to

assume future leadership roles within the **S.T.A.R.S.** organization as both instructors and board members.

The “Graduate Advisory Board” will be present at each Board Meeting and provide undoubtedly priceless input to senior leaders while also mentoring future participants. The future of the organization is theirs to blaze!

Milwaukee Hyperbaric Chamber Tour

The Center for Comprehensive Wound Care & Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy in Milwaukee is offering a tour of their facility to **S.T.A.R.S.** participants and staff on October 9th from 9:00 -11:00 am. All staff are invited to this unique facility to see how injured divers may be treated when suf-

fering DCS. In addition, participants will also learn about other forms of illnesses treated by Hyperbaric medicine.

There is no cost for this tour and interested parties are asked to be at 2900 West Oklahoma Avenue at 8:45 am to join the Kenosha staff and participants.



2011 S.T.A.R.S. Diver & Humanitarian of the Year



In preparation for the Illinois Scuba Council awards for area divers, **S.T.A.R.S.** solicited nominees for both our “Diver of the Year” and “Humanitarian of the Year” award.

Nominees for **S.T.A.R.S.** Diver of the Year included; Raphael Garcia, Jorge Galvan, and Ana Lilia Medina.

Nominees for **S.T.A.R.S.** Humanitarian of the Year included; Mark Niewoehner, Kevin Vaughn, and Ismael Torres.

Winners were selected by a non-biased team from Dallas, Texas without any knowledge of the organization. ICSSD winners will be selected in October.

And the winners are:

2011 S.T.A.R.S. Diver of the Year — Ana Lilia Medina

2011 S.T.A.R.S. Humanitarian of the Year — Kevin L. Vaughn

Virgin Islands Environmental Research Station Manager...beyond reach

Recently while working with the University of the U.S. Virgin Islands, Kevin was made aware of an open management position at a remote university facility on St. John called the Virgin Islands Environmental Research Station. www.islands.org/viers/



This unique tropical position spanned the roles of hotel manager, food service manager, scuba operations manager, security, and guest lecturer. The position greatly appealed to Kevin as his aspirations have been to move south to the islands. In the end, Kevin played all his cards in the bid for the position, but sadly was advised on August 9th that he had been cut from the list of candidates and lost out on yet another opportunity to live in paradise.



Change in Just Two Days of Diving by Ana Lilia Medina

The last few times that I've gone diving I've come to realize how diving can change a person's attitude in very short order. As an example, last weekend I had the opportunity to assist Kevin Vaughn with three of his private PADI students; Kurt (22), Hunter (11), and Max (12). All of them seemed excited to go diving and learn first-hand about the beauty and excitement of being underwater.

The first open water dive for these students was on August 7th. I found that before arriving at Pearl lake Kurt was very talkative and the younger boys were conversely very quiet. After we arrived, we assembled our gear and swam out to the buoy where we planned to descend to the platform below. Everyone was doing great until Max began to feel sick at the surface and he decided to end his diving due to a stomach ache seemingly brought on by an improper fitting wetsuit. Within minutes, Max's brother followed suit and exited the lake ill as well. It appeared that both young

students decided to end their dive training on the very first day after all the hard classroom and pool work was done.

Meanwhile Kurt overcame his trouble with clearing his ears to descend and perform his skills required and first two dives. On the following morning we arrived at the lake and Kurt quickly proceeded to finish his 2 dives and final skills to achieve his open water certification. However, Hunter and Max arrived late because they overslept and missed Kevin's transportation to the lake. In stark contrast to Saturday, something magical had happened overnight to both young boys. I found them to be more confident, focused, and excited to get into the water. After the boys assembled their gear and headed into the water, both executed their skills smoothly and did a fantastic job on even the Controlled Emergency Swimming Ascent which troubled them in the pool.

Upon finishing their two dives and initial skills, I saw both brothers more

excited than ever before from their accomplishments which made me very proud of them. We even had extra dive time which allowed us time to do a fun dive where the students got a chance to explore the lake even more. Coincidentally on the second day, two other diving friends joined us to dive in parallel. Though we did not have the chance to dive with them, they were both a big help to us in finding a lost computer/compass that became dislodged from Hunter's SPG console during his dive. The incident truly showed how divers pull together in a time of need.

Towards the end of the day, the boys were more relaxed and talkative than the entire weekend. I was actually impressed how much the first open water dives changed the students' attitude in just two days of diving. All three students headed home with a big smile on their faces and much to brag about. It was a very delightful and rewarding training experience.

Staff Member of the Month Ana Lilia Medina



S.T.A.R.S. SDI Divemaster Ana Lilia Medina will be starting her sophomore year of college on August 29th and declare her major by the end of the year. Ana is progressing towards a double major in Economics and Art and also considering a minor in Accounting. She has been involved with the **S.T.A.R.S.** International program since she graduated in 2006. Ana hopes that after she finishes college that she will achieve her PADI scuba instructor certification enabling her to play a bigger part in **S.T.A.R.S.** She openly states that she would like to move into Kevin's position as President and be able to direct **S.T.A.R.S.** going into the future. In the meantime, she will be focused on her schooling and try her very best to keep in touch with **S.T.A.R.S.**



Will Japan See **S.T.A.R.S.?**

After seeing the film documentary "The Cove" over a year ago, Kevin began corresponding with Ric O'Barry and his associates at Earth Justice offering his assistance to rally support for Ric from the scuba professionals. After diving with dolphins in the wild off the coast of Grand Turk, Kevin came away with a fascination for the mammals that have regrettably become huge attractions at many resorts, aquariums, and locales like Sea World.

Kevin's personal dolphin encounter in the wild validated Ric's position that dolphins deserve a better life than captivity in a confined concrete pond as

someone's property or attraction. With the help of the Illinois Scuba Council, Kevin sought to bring Ric and his story to the attention of Chicago divers and the 2012 DEMA convention in Orlando this November. Regrettably, the venture became cost prohibitive as money raised needs to be used to free dolphins and not lavishly tell the story.

This venture led to a precedent setting offer from Earth Justice for Kevin to travel to Taiji, Japan on August 29th to participate in "International Dolphin Day" on September 1st at "The Cove", the site of the annual dolphin slaughter. While in Japan, Kevin will represent

the youth and staff of S.T.A.R.S. International, the Chicago area dive clubs within the Illinois Council of Skin & Scuba Divers, and the love his family has for these stunning ocean dwellers.

Kevin plans to thoroughly document his trip and provide daily updates if possible through the S.T.A.R.S. Blog if communications permit. Despite the extensive cost for this trip, Kevin simply hopes to bring about a broader awareness of these atrocities against dolphins by Japan and give them a voice in the face of their murderers. If you have not already seen "The Cove", please do. You need to understand the hurt and tears that it causes.

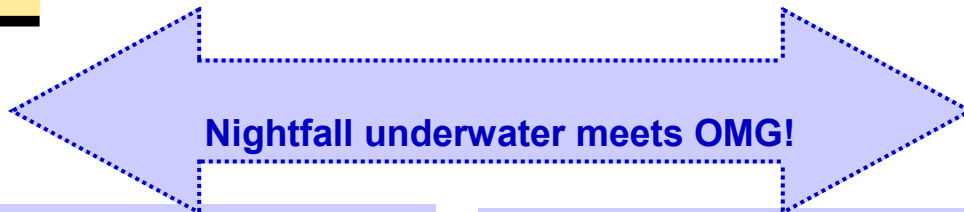


“The only time you can’t afford to fail is the last time you try.”

Charles Kettering

2011 Rescue Diver Course - September 17 & 18

Join all of the 2011 Kenosha graduates for the upcoming PADI Rescue Diver Course weekend at Pearl Lake at 7:45 am - 1:00 pm both days. Cheer the kids on by either fulfilling the role of a victim or refresh your skills alongside of them. To partake in the event, please notify Kevin via e-mail by September 10th. This will be Kevin's last dive of 2011 as well as he rolls into the OR for surgery on September 20th which will decommission him for the remainder of the year. Just like any old ship sometimes they need to be anchored in port for repairs. Hope to see you there.... to rescue me from them!



Nightfall underwater meets OMG!

With inclement weather facing the team for one of the two nights planned for the event, it was decided to move all of the PADI Night Diving Specialty dives into one evening on August 19th. **S.T.A.R.S.** participants and 3 experienced Night Diving staff were on-hand with a new inventory of dive lights to guide the event that was briefed in Kenosha on the previous night. Although the warm August temperatures plagued the divers with low visibility, it provided an optimal “STAR LIT” night for the dive. The starry night

brought back memories of a Christmas sky (visualize the “**12 days of Christmas**”).

Besides wishing on the falling stars seen during the surface intervals, the highlight of the evening was locating the Thora Ann wooden fishing trawler without a reference on the final dive. All participants expressed their enthusiasm and excitement upon completing the dives which for some is now their fourth PADI Dive Specialty certification this summer after completing 23 dives in the past eight weeks.

