

OUR WORLD UNDERWATER

2007 SHOW GUIDE



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**Includes an issue of
Dive Chronicles**

Hippocampus Colemani (White Pygmy Seahorse)
Wakatobi Dive Resort - www.wakatobi.com
Photo by: Rod Klein, Nikon D2X, 105mm 1/250 at f22

UNDER WATER ANGELS

DIVEHEART



I don't know what it takes to become an angel. At least on the surface I don't, but I know some underwater angels. I just witnessed seven of them earning their wings.

I was in Grand Cayman to observe a Handicapped Scuba Association training course conducted by Jim Elliott of the Diveheart Foundation. The experience opened my eyes to a segment of scuba diving that I didn't know much about. I came away with a strong respect for handicapped divers and for the instructors and trained dive buddies that dive with them.

The course was held at Cobalt Coast Resort in Grand Cayman. The seven angels are all instructors from Dive Tech's facility there.

The course gives instructors an opportunity to experience diving the way that their future handicapped students experience it. To grasp this experience, imagine doing an entire dive with your eyes closed, or without using your legs at all, or without using both your arms and your legs. Such an experience will change your perspective on diving.

The Handicapped Scuba Association instructor course is laid out in classroom, pool and open water segments. The content is highly focused on adapting the skills and

techniques required to scuba dive to individuals with handicaps while helping the handicapped diver have a good, safe experience under water.

The first techniques taught were those for divers who are blind. They are signal and communication skills and working with equipment. One of the team wore a mask with the lenses blacked out while the rest of the group worked through the techniques. Roles were then switched until all had experienced both sides of the training.

The next progression of skills was for divers who are paraplegic. Once the diver was in the water, the necessary adaptations involved legs that do not work. The training was accomplished by using a belt secured around the legs of team members to simulate loss of leg movement. The real challenge was moving the paraplegic diver to the water and getting them out of the water at the end of the dive. Getting out of the water in the pool was a bit challenging, but the real challenge came in open water where the support divers are not able to stand. Once mastered, the skills and techniques worked well, and the process moved smoothly.

The final set of skills focused on divers who are quadriplegic. The skills include dealing with wet suits, gearing up, signaling and moving through the



water. However, what impressed me the most were the challenges of how to handle underwater necessities that other divers do so often that they become second nature; clearing a mask, equalizing ears and recovering a lost regulator. None of these tasks can be easily accomplished without the use of arms. Under such circumstances, they are daunting issues.

The solution is to use multiple trained dive buddies / instructors to make sure that these necessities are taken care of. When ever the lead diver equalized their ears, they also pinch off the nose of their handicapped buddy to allow them to equalize. The lead diver is also responsible for watching to make sure that the handicapped diver's mask is clear of water, and to initiate clearing it when needed. Close proximity and constant observation address the issue of a lost regulator.

This week long course left me with a strong feeling of admiration. Admiration both for handicapped divers who are willing to place their trust in their instructors and certified buddies as well as for the instructors and certified buddies for their willingness to participate in programs such as this one. They are divers who are truly giving back to the dive community and the sport of diving. These dive angels are truly to be commended.

Jim Elliott, who directed this course, is the founder and president of the Diveheart Foundation, a non-profit tax exempt organization created to provide and support educational scuba diving and snorkeling programs to physically impaired children and adults. He is a PADI Master Scuba Diver Trainer and a Handicapped Scuba Association Course Director. To date, Diveheart





Foundation has sponsored the direct training of over three hundred handicapped divers, two hundred and fifty dive buddies and fifty HSA Instructors. Jim and Diveheart also do periodic dive trips to the Florida Keys with handicapped divers, and will now be including the Cayman Islands in the group's trip plans as well.



The organization's web address is: www.diveheart.org. The Diveheart Foundation will gladly accept tax deductible donations. They are also always in need of volunteers nationwide to help with their programs.

Dive Chronicles congratulates Jim Elliott, The DiveHeart Foundation and Dive Tech and joins with them in congratulating the seven new underwater angels: Mark Leibbrandt (South Africa), Steve Tippetts (UK), Zelda Norden (South Africa), Susan Dasher (USA), Chris Brandson (Canada), Eleanore Head (UK), Brandee Milman (Canada).

