



Tammy Duckworth prepares to dive (above) and is aided by Diveheart president Jim Elliot (center) and volunteer Rex Jennings. | JOSEPH P. MEIER~SOUTHTOWNSTAR

Duckworth dives back into scuba

Double amputee triumphs at a 'little thing'

BY SUSAN DEMAR LAFFERTY
SouthtownStar

Tammy Duckworth flew combat missions in Iraq, ran a heated campaign for Congress and has heard herself touted as a potential recipient of Democrat Barack Obama's

U.S. Senate seat.

But Thursday, she achieved a personal triumph of a different sort by focusing on one of the "many little things" she now finds "so much harder to do."

The Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs director and former cer-

tified scuba diver took her first scuba dive in 10 years.

"Water is freedom, freedom from my wheelchair, freedom from gravity and prosthetic devices," she said.

Duckworth lost both legs four years ago in Iraq while serving with the National Guard.

"I've been wanting to get back into scuba diving for a long time," Duckworth said, as she dried off af-

ter her hourlong session at Orland Park's Scuba Emporium with the Diveheart Foundation.

"It seems once you are injured, there are so many little things that are so much harder to do," she said.

But diving with the disabled is the Diveheart Foundation's reason for being. Diveheart volunteers helped Duckworth and four teenagers from Shriners Hospital

for Children in Chicago in getting their gear on, and taking this first important dive since being injured.

Duckworth swims regularly with special "swimming legs," but she took joy in returning to scuba.

"This has been tremendous," she said. "It's good therapy on top of being fun."

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