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CHICAGO RIDGE ATHLETE DISCOVERS UNDERWATER PASSION

Jim Schroeder Becomes Certified SCUBA Diver

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From the pool to the ocean, Jim Schroeder's passion for swimming opened the doors to new underwater experiences. In June, Jim became a certified SCUBA diver, obtaining Level-1 open water certification.

Jim's journey to the ocean began more than a year ago with the help of his swim coach, Emily Griffith. "Swim Coach Emily asked me and the rest of the swim team if we would like to discover SCUBA," said Schroeder of Chicago Ridge. That offer began Jim's 16-month process to become SCUBA certified.

"We practiced in the local high school swimming pool once a month for an hour over the course of a year," said Schroeder. "In the spring, the instructors observed us in and out of the water performing different skills. We had to swim eight lengths of the pool and float for a certain period of time before completing the training."

To prepare for SCUBA certification, Jim practiced specific skills in the pool once a week. Along with in-water preparation, Jim completed 12 hours of classroom training, watched a DVD at home, participated in classroom work on a computer and took a test after each classroom chapter.



After 16 months of preparation and training, Jim traveled to Key Largo, Fla., to obtain his certification. "I worked with a volunteer organization called Diveheart," said Schroeder. "It helps people with special needs and military wounded learn to SCUBA dive."

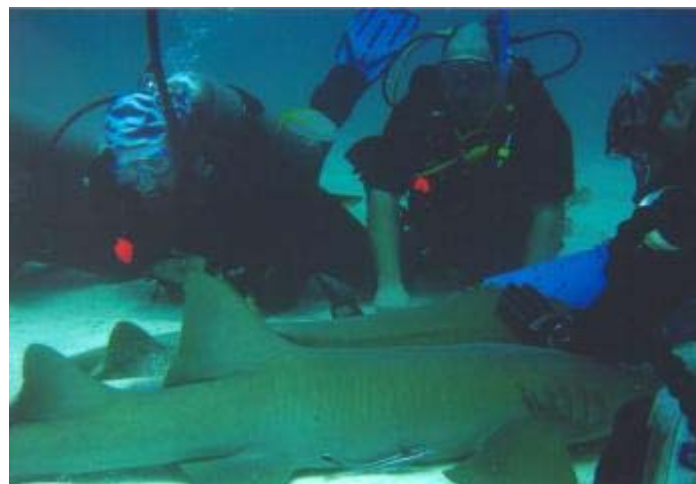
Five other Special Olympics athletes from around the country accompanied Jim to obtain certification.

Individual skills were tested in lagoons before making four dives in the ocean at 30 feet under the water.

During his dives, Jim had the chance to pet 6- to 7-foot long nurse sharks, along with witnessing a moray eel, barracuda, lobster and an assortment of colored fish.

All the athletes obtained SCUBA certification, with Jim receiving the highest level. "I would say receiving my SCUBA certification was my best moment and I recommend it to everyone," said Schroeder.

Obtaining SCUBA certification is not the only accomplishment on Jim's record. Along with swimming, Jim participates in bowling, golf and softball. Earlier this year, he received a gold medal for Unified golf at the district level, and competing in the state tournament, receiving a silver medal, along with his Unified Partner Dorothy McElligott.



Jim also takes part in activities outside of Special Olympics. At Rich East High School in Park Forest where his sister works as a Special Education teacher, Jim is an advocate for Special Olympics. "I am helping my sister spread the word at her school about Special Olympics," said Schroeder. "I am also volunteering with the track and field team."

Jim previously gave a speech to the school's special education teachers about Special Olympics. He also spoke with one of his old teachers at Trinity College about Special

Olympics and his experiences in school.

With his accomplishments in Special Olympics and the community, Jim is a role model for all athletes. He sees Special Olympics as a way to compete, meet with friends and be accepted as a part of a group. His advice to young athletes is simple: "Get involved and don't be afraid."

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