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A GUIDE TO THE GREATER FORT MYERS BUSINESS INDUSTRY

Recreational dive business heating up Summer, lobster season best for scuba

BY MICHELLE L. START

Correspondent

Lobster season is fast approaching, the waters are warming up and Fort Myers scuba diving shops are kicking into busy season.

Whether interested in spearfishing, hunting for shark teeth, traveling the world or just recreational diving, there are an array of shops in Fort Myers to meet almost every need.

At Capt. Pete's Diving Outfitters, deposits are being taken for a fall 2008 trip to Australia. Another trip is being organized by Underwater Explorers to Bonaire. Dean's Dive Center is organizing spearfishing trips. Seahorse Scuba and Scuba Quest are both holding summer camps that will certify area children in the sport.

At the five shops throughout Fort Myers, nearly 1,000 people get some sort of diving certification every year. In the United States, there are an estimated 10 million divers, according to Skin Diver Magazine.

Ramiro Palma, assistant manager of Scuba Quest, said local traffic is already picking up for the summer.

"The water is nice and cool," he said. "The lobster mini season is coming up, too. It is the last Wednesday and Thursday of July. It allows you to get 12 lobsters per diver per day. You can get 24 lobsters in two days. The beginning of lobster season is a busy time for all of the stores."

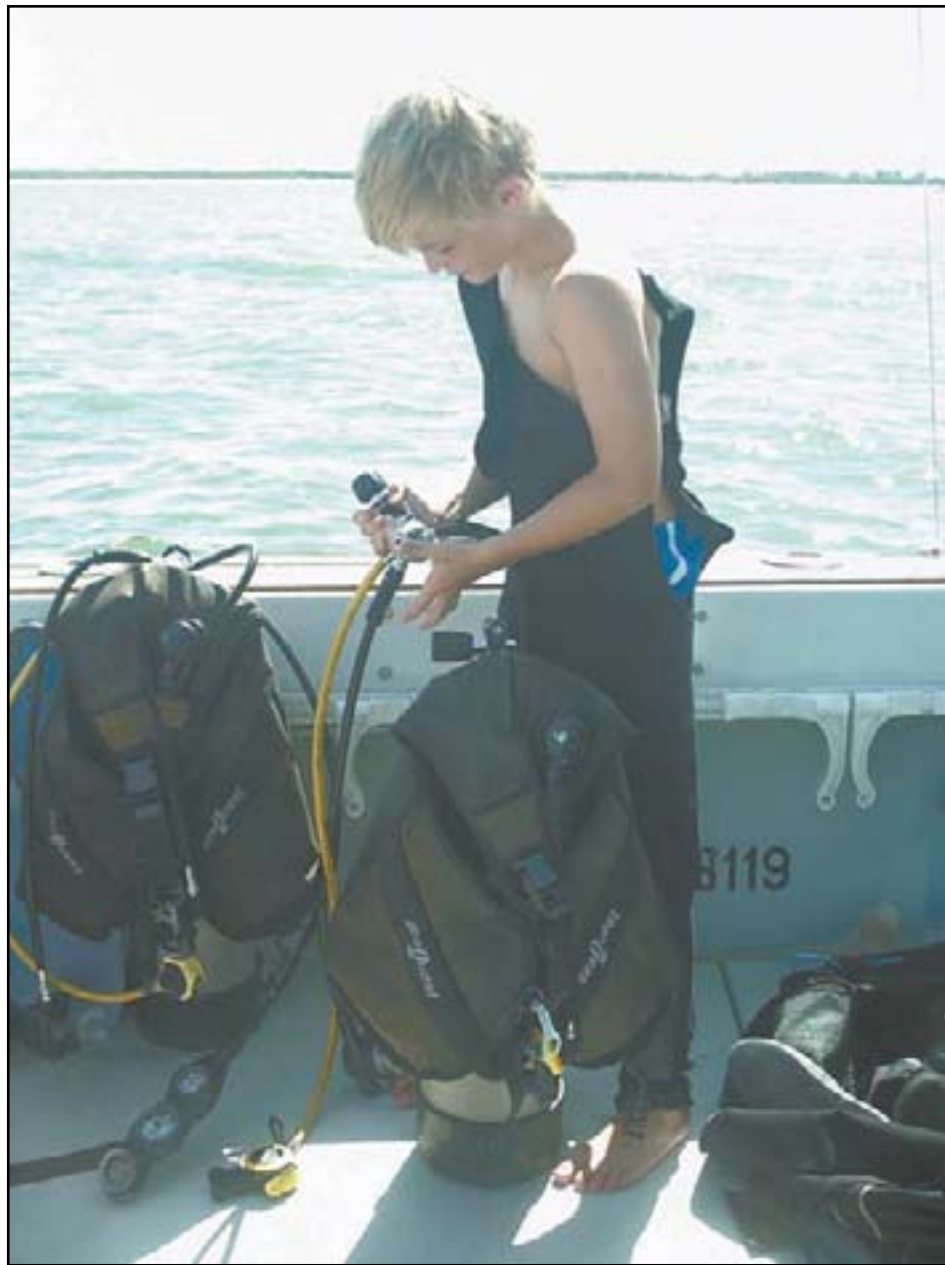
The store offers open water classes, which allows for diving in up to 60 feet of water, for \$99. The cost of books and the check-out dives is additional.

Opened in 1968, Underwater Explorers is the oldest shop in town and certifies more than 200 divers a year. The shop offers one stop shopping from lessons to gear to trips and even has an on-site swimming pool.

"We teach classes all of the way up to instructional," said general manager Bob Hines. "We don't try to sell the cheapest thing in town. Instead we try to sell the things people will use for a long time. We sell things we can fix here and we work with manufacturers who will back up their products."

Pete Williamson owns Fort Myers' newest dive shop, Capt. Pete's Diving Outfitter, which opened in February on Colonial Boulevard.

"I had been in the business for a number of years and decided to go on my own about 2 1/2 years ago," he said. At that time, he opened up a shop on Pine Island Road in Cape Coral. "We are definitely geared toward recreational diving. We have a bigger selection in the stores and we do a lot more travel than anyone else in the area."



COURTESY PHOTO

Eleven-year-old Ben Fisher from Fort Myers assembles his equipment on the boat before his first open water training dive. Ben was attending Seahorse Scuba's summer dive camp.

The reasons people decide to become certified vary, but for Brent Argabright, owner of Dean's Dive Center, it was simple. He worked as a manager at a Goodyear store when he decided that he was tired of that line of work and opened his store 15 years ago.

"People don't want to spend money to fix their cars. They want to spend it and have fun," he said. "I like sharing that experience."

Although the shop offers an array of classes to suit various levels of divers, Argabright said spearfishing is one of his

specialties. The walls of the store are lined with photographs from various trips and large lobsters.

Seahorse Scuba owner Bill Warren worked in the retail dive business for more than 20 years and decided to close his retail shop this past May, but continue to do the "fun" things associated with the sport.

This summer he anticipates certifying some 20 to 25 children between the ages of 10 and 15 through his summer camp program. Warren continues to organize diving trips and check-out dives in addition to the summer camp.

LOCAL DIVE SHOPS:

>>Seahorse Scuba: (239) 454-3111
www.seahorsescuba.com

>>Dean's Dive Center: 15200 S Tamiami Tr,
Suite 103, Fort Myers, (239) 489-0500
www.deansdivecenter.com

>>Capt. Pete's Diving Outfitters: 4391 Colo-
nial Blvd, Suite, (239) 337-9564
www.captpetes.com

>>Underwater Explorers Diving: 12600
Mcgregor Blvd, Fort Myers, FL 33919
(239) 481-4733, www.underwaterexplorers.net

>>Scuba Quest: 11705 S Cleveland Ave # 3
Fort Myers, FL 33907, (239) 936-7106
www.scubaquestusa.com



COURTESY PHOTO

Brent Argabright, owner of Dean's Dive Center, fixing a dive computer. Fort Myers dive shops are gearing up for a busy summer season.

"We don't take any more than six kids per camp," said Warren. "If they are at least 15, we can get them their adult open water certification. From 12 to 14, we get them junior open water certification and they have to dive with an adult. With those between 10 and 12, they can only dive in 40 feet or less and must dive with a parent or an instructor until they are 12."

Warren charges \$350 for the camp, which lasts a week and culminates with open water dives on an artificial reef near the Sanibel Causeway. ■

Business ethics celebrated by Uncommon Friends

BY STEPHANIE WESTENDORF

swestendorf@florida-weekly.com

In an era where corporate scandals dominate headlines and an ebbing real estate market has unveiled a number of shady dealings, business ethics can seem like a foreign concept. Nonetheless, the Uncommon Friends Foundation held a business ethics forum last Thursday at Florida Gulf Coast University to celebrate the finalists of their second annual Business Ethics Award and hold a discussion with other local business leaders.

Finalist companies included Entech Computer Services, LeeSar, a healthcare supplier to Lee Memorial Health System,



The Uncommon Friends Foundation honored three local companies for adhering to a high standard of business ethics. From left to right are finalist (and winner) Alan Reynolds, Chairman and CEO of Wilson Miller, Inc.; Tom Hoolihan, President of Board of Directors Uncommon Friends Foundation; Arlene Roth, Executive Director of Uncommon Friends; finalist Martin Haas, President of Entech Computer Services; finalist Robert Simpson, LeeSar President and CEO.

and the consulting group Wilson Miller, Inc. Charles J. Fornaciari, Uncommon Friends Chair of Ethics, led the forum with topics ranging from instilling ethics in employees to making ethical decisions.

The company leaders shared their strategies for incorporating ethics into organizations. Linda Jones, Director of Human Resources of last year's winner, HomeBanc Mortgage Corporation, stressed the importance of being able to see from the customer's perspective. Martin Haas, president of Entech Computer Services, said that his workers are all members of different committees in the company

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