

INTERNATIONAL LEGENDS HONORED FOR TRAIL BLAZING LIVES



▲ This years International Legends of Diving. Photo by: Christopher Guglielmo

▲ Scuba 2000 Owner Alec Peirce shows the Bahamas who's in charge. Photo by: Christopher Guglielmo

By Jamie Farris
Writer, Dive News Network

They are the trail blazers of the world's waterways who explored new frontiers to make the way for generations of scuba divers to come. They are the International Legends of Diving and in April of this year they were honored for the work they have done and the things that they have accomplished.

Jeff Rice brought the event he has conducted annually at his Portage Quarry, near Bowling Green, Ohio to the Grand Bahamas Island's International Underwater Explorers Society. At the UNEXSO facility in April the legends were the focus of a three-day celebration of their lives and scuba diving contributions. Those honored were Dr. John Clement, Ollie Ferguson, Dave Woodward, Ben Rose, Dr. Jose Jones, Nick Icorn, Neal Watson, Dottie Frazier, Alec Peirce, John Englander, Karen Rolle accepting for her husband Nick Rolle, and Robert Croft.

The event brought worldwide attention to the diving heroes who have dedicated their lives to scuba diving. Some of the divers are local legends as well most notably Ben Rose, who discovered Ben's Cavern located in the Lucayan National Park; John Englander, who is the former owner of UNEXSO and Dr. John Clement, who was in charge of the hyperbaric chamber and one of the original founders of UNEXSO.

Rice was beside himself with awe during the weekend. "It all meant a lot to me," he said. "Putting this thing together has to be one of the hardest things I have ever done, making sure that everyone got here and that the dives went well, but in the end it was all very worth it."

Rice added that the event also had an element of educating local students. Each day Rice and two of the legends visited local high school to tell students about the history of the sport and current standards in

the industry. Rice said that one of the most thrilling moments of the event happened at one of the schools.

"Bob Croft was a free-diving record holder in 1968," Rice said. "During one of the class room visits we met a teen named Brian. We had heard that Brian had been free diving on a local wreck to about 90 feet. This kid was practicing on this 90-foot dive and he was only 14 years old. So Bob goes over and sits down with the boy explaining how free diving works, how not to get hurt and to have better dives. It was an amazing thing to watch, here was this guy, a legend in our industry and he is sort of passing the torch to this new young diver. It was just an incredible experience to be there while it was taking place. Bob said that the most fun he had been working with the kids."

Peirce said he was excited to be included in the company of the other legends. "We had a great time. You know how it is when a bunch

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▲ Dr. Jose Jones, an author, mentor, and even a sixth degree black belt in Tae Kwon Do takes the time for a beautiful Bahamas Dive. Photo by: Christopher Guglielmo



▲ Dottie Frasier, the first female Scuba instructor in the United States. Photo by: Christopher Guglielmo

of old guys get together, there are stories and such. It was great to see old friends and to be able to spend time doing what we all love. I've schooled a lot of divers in my time. It has been estimated that I have taught about 6,500 divers and today I see a lot of those divers going on to do other things. I have taught divers who are now working for NASA and diving in South Africa doing work on the coast there. These young folks have taken what I taught them and gone on to make a difference. You can't wish for more than that. It is the responsibility of the older legends to pass on what we know."

The event hosted the divers in three stages, first they were invited to a reunion of all the past UNEXSO employees, being treated to dinner and an evening of visiting. Next they took part in dives each day. "These guys did it all," Rice said. "They did the reef dives, the shark dives all of it. We even

were honored with watching Ben Rose feed the sharks for the first time since 1996. Ben is well known for his ability to calm the sharks down into an almost trance like state. It was amazing to watch." Finally on the last night the legends were given special awards designed by local artist Sydney Pratt. The award was a blown glass scuba diver designed especially for the event.

Jones summed a lot of what the other divers felt at the end of the event. "When

I was growing up my legends, the people I idolized were these guys. I am standing next to many of the men and women who inspired me. I never thought that I would see all of my idols in the sport of diving in one place let alone be counted among them." ■

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