



www.scubaemporium.com

Scuba Emporium

16336 S 104th Avenue Orland Park, IL 60467
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The Dive Store

WHY DID I OPEN A DIVE STORE IN THE MIDWEST?

It was back in 1972 when I was attending a local college. I was in charge of the DIVE club and by 1973 we had over 150 members, not bad for back then. Our club was running trips and teaching at a school, in fact I was paid by the school for many years for conducting the SCUBA program. Our problem was we had very few places to get equipment and air. The answer changed my life, **I opened a DIVE store**, my folks thought I was out in left field opening a DIVE center in Illinois, to them we had no water. I knew better and at age 16 I had my first boat by which I explored many spots in Lake Michigan. That big lake almost ate me alive in my 16 foot boat. But I learned a lot. So I opened the store in Evergreen Park Illinois, funny I still remember the address 3574 west 95th street.

Now the club had a way to grow and get equipment as well as air, I was on top of the world, at age 21 and teaching at a school as well being an owner of a DIVE center. I started getting very busy, teaching divers and I found a new path, Public Safety Divers. All around the area were and are many ponds and lakes. Local cities had a bad way to look for a person that went under, that was a hook and drag method. I was able to convince many of the departments to let us go under and bring back the swimmer without the hooks. By 1975 I was a PADI Course Director; today I have the pleasure of being one of the most experienced and longest lasting PADI Platinum Course Director in the USA. So now I am running the DIVE center and teaching local fire departments and training people to become SCUBA Instructors. I had to let the position go at Moraine Valley Community College. I handed it off to a person I thought would do a great job. He kept it going for a few years and then let it go. That broke my heart, but I had no time to mend that. I was too busy running my two stores which made me very active in training. We went to Pearl Lake, just about every weekend with 30 to 40 people. It was unbelievable, but I had a great team and we all loved it. The Holiday Inn had two rooms ready for us and we would just walk in and they would hand us our keys. The North shore was my spot and everyone knew that. Some weekends we would train in Racine on Saturday and stay at Lake Geneva that night, to play. Then head to Pearl on Sunday, we did that once or twice a month and the other times we stayed at Pearl. We would promote the fantastic weekend as a weekend in the country. Here I am 25 years later taking people to Pearl Lake for a weekend in the country. Racine closed a few years back and I am sorry to see that.

By 1980 I had the Alsip store with a built in pool, the Atlanta store with a built in pool (this made my folks happy at least Georgia touches the ocean) and a small resort in Crystal River Florida where the Manatee still play. I was teaching Instructors all over the US as well as in the Islands. I had programs in Cozumel with as many as 35 candidates. Life was good and diving was fun. But it was now a real business, respected by families and even banks. So I started helping others open stores and break into the business. I was proud of that. The SCUBA industry is a fun one and when I can help someone get into this business and they go off and develop their own students and customers, this makes me feel good. By 1981 I opened a school in Chicago at Midway airport, The International PADI Instructor Training Center, with one of the founders of PADI Ralph Erickson. We ran the school for many years until Ralph moved to Texas. Ralph has passed away but his wife and daughter are still very close to me. Together we founded the non-profit Ralph Erickson Educational Foundation; the foundation helps underprivileged divers earn their PADI Instructor rating. I guess it is time for me to give back.

Today I am the only PADI Platinum Course director with over 35 years of experience. I train more Instructors in a year, than most instructors train new divers. I still enjoy helping people get into our industry and working at the store greeting our customers.



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Life is good and the SCUBA life is fascinating, thank you for being my customer and supporting SCUBA EMPORIUM.