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MAY 22, 2018

# Meet Jim Elliott of Diveheart



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Today we'd like to introduce you to Jim Elliott.

So, before we jump into specific questions about the business, why don't you give us some details about you and your story.

The Diveheart vision was inspired by Jim Elliott's blind daughter in the mid-1980s. Elliott, founder and president of Diveheart, witnessed how downhill skiing changed his daughter's life and inspired his friends without disabilities to take on

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As a diver since 1976, Elliott realized that scuba diving was the only physical activity that could provide a “gravity-free” environment while offering an exciting and adventurous experience for those with physical and cognitive disabilities. He knew that the confidence and independence his daughter developed through skiing could be replicated many times over with children, adults and veterans of all abilities through scuba diving.

Elliott began teaching adaptive scuba in 1997 and incorporated Diveheart as a volunteer, not-for-profit organization in 2001. Jim, through Diveheart, has lead the way in helping to pioneer adaptive scuba training, research, rehabilitation, education and promotion around the world. In addition to his work in almost two hundred cities throughout the U.S., this also has included working in China, Australia, Israel, the UK, and throughout the Caribbean and South-East Asia.

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Throughout its existence, Diveheart has developed adaptive scuba programs for such organizations as the Shiners Hospital for Children, Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago, Hines Veterans Hospital and many other organizations around the United States and the world. Appreciating the need to update and improve upon adaptive scuba training programs and to share the best training practices in use, Diveheart became an adaptive scuba training agency in 2014 and has developed proprietary standards for instructors and qualified divers interested in adaptive diving.

**Overall, has it been relatively smooth? If not, what were some of the struggles along the way?**

As a volunteer, not-for-profit organization, we face the challenging task of keeping all of our volunteers engaged and active, regardless of their location, role and level of ability. We also endeavor to grow that all-important base, allowing us to maintain the safety standards we've

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set for providing the life-changing scuba experience to a growing number of adaptive divers. Fundraising is a continuing challenge – we rely on the generosity of donors for use of facilities, scuba gear, training trips to warm-water locations for adaptive dive students.

**Alright – so let’s talk business. Tell us about Diveheart – what should we know?**

Today, adaptive scuba is a dynamic and growing segment of the scuba industry. In part, this is a result of Diveheart’s proactive marketing and promotion of its unique training and dive trip programs. Diveheart’s approach of using scuba as a tool to help individuals with disabilities build confidence, independence and self-esteem has created a fundamental change in the way the dive community views and works with individuals challenged by impairments.

Scuba diving is a very powerful tool that can change the life of someone with a disability after just one pool experience.

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It can transform someone from a very sedentary lifestyle and motivate them to take on new challenges.

This new identity gives individuals with disabilities the opportunity to look at their abilities differently. It helps them focus on what they “can do” and not on what they “can’t do”, inspiring those around them to take on new challenges which they might not have otherwise considered. Another Diveheart vision is to unleash the unrealized human potential that exists in the population of individuals with disabilities. Once Diveheart creates a positive paradigm shift in a person’s perception of his own disability, we then introduce him to various scuba-related educational, occupational and professional opportunities.

Diveheart is also spearheading efforts to engage in and promote research that will scientifically explore the therapeutic benefits of scuba diving for individuals afflicted with a broad range of

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impairments, including autism, Down's Syndrome, spinal cord injuries, amputations, blindness and traumatic brain injuries. Diveheart is collaborating with researchers at Duke University Medical Center and Northwestern University to understand more about how hyperbaric pressures and zero gravity might mitigate various medical disorders. The anecdotal evidence observed by Diveheart suggests that individuals with a wide variety of disabilities may benefit from scuba therapy.

Preliminary research has shown that adaptive diving can improve pulmonary function, sensory and muscular deficits, and painful disorders, including spine pain and post-traumatic stress disorders. For instance, a Diveheart promoted pilot study designed and conducted by Northwestern University supported the premise that adaptive diving can significantly enhance the quality of life for autistic children and young adults. The need to explore scuba as a pain

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management treatment modality for spinal cord victims is another area worthy of future research. Several paralyzed Adaptive Divers have reported significant reductions in their pain levels following multiple days of diving.

It is also Diveheart's vision to build a "state of the art" Adaptive Diving facility, to conduct research, rehabilitation, education, training and vocational work in the world's deepest warm deep therapy pool. The facility will draw the best and the brightest from around the world in medical research, therapy, aerospace and other sciences. Forget the moon; "Inner Space" is where the next frontier is waiting. Diveheart's planned futuristic facility will help individuals of all abilities experience the benefits of zero gravity.

Diveheart believes anybody can be a scuba diver, regardless of their abilities (with just a few exceptions) and adaptive scuba training should be no different than what others receive through nationally recognized scuba training agencies.

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Individuals with disabilities, however, do need supplemental training to learn various adaptations that will enable them to perform scuba skills. Diveheart knows the importance of complying with established scuba diving academic and performance standards, including the standards promulgated by the Recreational Scuba Training Council (RSTC).

The RSTC, however, did not envision adaptive scuba and therefore did not develop any standards or protocols for such diving. Over the years, adaptive training agencies and organizations, like Diveheart, developed supplemental standards and practices for adaptive dive training. These organizations applied the RSTC performance standards and additionally recognized that assistance rendered by competent divers to help a diver with disabilities execute scuba skills is an acceptable and reasonably safe practice.

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Diveheart developed their own training program to present the best practices and standards currently used by adaptive dive organizations, and to share Diveheart's updated standards, protocols and guidelines that were specifically designed to improve and enhance safety in its training program.

**Any shoutouts? Who else deserves credit in this story – who has played a meaningful role?**

Diveheart is a volunteer-driven organization – we could not provide the life-changing experiences of scuba to the adaptive dive community without those who give freely of their time, training and experience. The generosity of donors worldwide allows us to move forward with our vision of creating the world's deepest warm water therapy and education facility.

Our adaptive diver participants and their families contribute greatly through education and outreach – sharing their stories and experiences that allowed them

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to “imagine the Possibilities” in their lives achieved through scuba diving.

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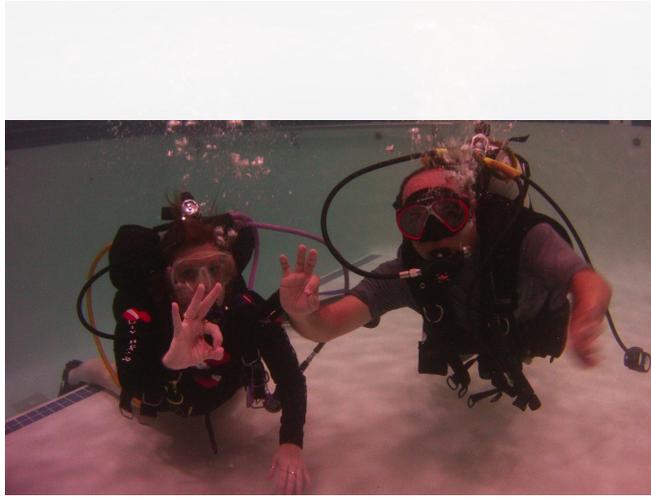
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SoCal Team and Adaptive Divers

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