

Jim Elliott is “a real hero with a heart of gold,” said Peter Martineau, senior marketing coordinator for Aquarium of the Pacific. Jim, who is the founder and president of Diveheart, received the Glenn McIntyre Heritage Award during the Aquarium of the Pacific’s 8th Annual Festival of Human Abilities on January 30th. The award was given to Elliott honoring his work with Diveheart.



Elliott founded Diveheart, a 501(c)(3) a volunteer run, not-for-profit organization in 2001. His vision was to help build confidence and independence in children, adults and veterans with disabilities through the sport of SCUBA diving. “Thanks to the *wonder of the water column*, the ocean and lakes of the world become the forgiving weightless environment. This provides perfect buoyancy and balance to any individual who might otherwise struggle on land in the hope of providing both physical and therapeutic value. It is this *can do* spirit that Diveheart hopes to instill to its participants,” said Elliott. He has traveled across the country and throughout the world, teaching individuals to dive, and training instructors to work with divers with disabilities.

The Aquarium of the Pacific’s Annual Festival of Human Abilities was designed to showcase unique adaptive skills in many areas, demonstrated and taught by experts with disabilities. This year’s event included performances of hip-hop wheelchair dancing, singing in sign language, artwork by a person with quadriplegia who paints with the wheels of his wheelchair, and more. Elliott demonstrated adaptive SCUBA diving to record-breaking crowds at the Festival. “We were able to show the audience how

to dive with someone who is quadriplegic and someone who is blind. The demonstrations sparked the imagination of those watching, and encouraged them to imagine the possibilities in their own lives,” Elliott said.

Glenn McIntyre, for whom the award was named, was the founder of the event. A wonderful example of the great potential that individuals with disabilities have, McIntyre overcame enormous physical challenges after being critically injured as a young police officer. A paraplegic, Glenn continued his career in law enforcement and also served as an advocate, inspirational speaker and instructor. What had previously been called Aquarium of the Pacific’s Heritage Award, was renamed in McIntyre’s memory after his death last year. Elliott was the first recipient of the newly named honor.

The Annual Festival of Human Abilities is a major event for the Aquarium of the Pacific. “I’d call it a signature event. It’s very unique. When we started it, there were no other events like it. It’s very unique in celebrating the creative abilities of people with disabilities,” said Martineau. He explained that Elliott has been training staff members at the Aquarium for several years. “We felt that he was someone deserving of the

award. It wasn’t a difficult decision. It’s pretty clear that he has a large impact all over the world, helping people with disabilities experience the weightless environment under water,” he added.

“I am very honored to be receiving this award. It is especially meaningful as we are celebrating Diveheart’s 10th anniversary. I accepted the Glenn McIntyre Heritage Award not for personal achievements, but for Diveheart’s body of work to date, achieved by the thousands of Diveheart volunteers, participants, friends and donors who have made Diveheart a leader in the world of adaptive SCUBA diving,” said Elliott. “The Aquarium is very visionary and enlightened in its effort to reach out to people with disabilities. They recognize the value in individuals with disabilities recognizing and pursuing the great possibilities in their own lives. In our everyday world, you don’t see that very often. The Aquarium of the Pacific is ahead of the curve.”

Elliott said that he hopes that Diveheart will have the opportunity to work further with Aquarium of the Pacific in adaptive SCUBA training courses for instructors, buddies and Divemasters. For further information, visit www.diveheart.org or www.aquariumofthepacific.org.