



RUTHANNE AVES

Ruthanne Aves Loves Giving Back

BY WENDY FOSTER

It was a perfect match. Ruthanne Aves visited Diveheart's booth at a scuba diving expo several years ago. "I had been a special education teacher at a junior high school for 34 years. When I saw what Diveheart does, I was so excited to see how I could put two loves together: diving, and working with people with disabilities," she said.

Diveheart, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, provides scuba diving instruction and opportunities for children and adults with disabilities and wounded veterans. Diveheart's office is located in Downers Grove, and the organization has chapters around the world.

Aves first started diving in 1991 but wasn't able to pursue it actively until she retired and moved to Chicago three years ago. She became a certified dive buddy two years ago on a Diveheart trip

to Cozumel, and she volunteers with the organization as often as she is able. "I am usually part of a team assigned to help a specific diver on a given dive. The number of people on a team varies depending on the amount of assistance the adaptive diver requires," she said. "It's an incredible feeling to watch the look on the face of the adaptive diver as they become weightless and can move in ways that they may never have been able to before. Sharing that experience is so much more intense and satisfying than just diving for recreation had been for me."

Aves loves to help whenever and however she's able, and thus, was happy to roll up her sleeves and produce masks for use during the COVID-19 pandemic. "I heard people were making masks, and I was excited that I could contribute in that way," she said. She learned that

Chicago's Shirley Ryan AbilityLab was gratefully accepting masks "so that patients could have their caregivers visit and receive training to aid in their recovery. This really resonated with me," Aves said, recalling that she'd been diving with a young man who had spent four months at the AbilityLab after a severe injury left him a person with quadriplegia. She has since sewn and donated more than 130 masks for the AbilityLab in his honor, another 30 to a Diveheart volunteer for his daughter's wedding and is sewing more for a senior living community. She's also made many for friends and neighbors.

Jim Elliott, president/founder of Diveheart, stated, "Ruthanne is a generous volunteer. We are so fortunate that Diveheart has benefited from her time and her kindness."