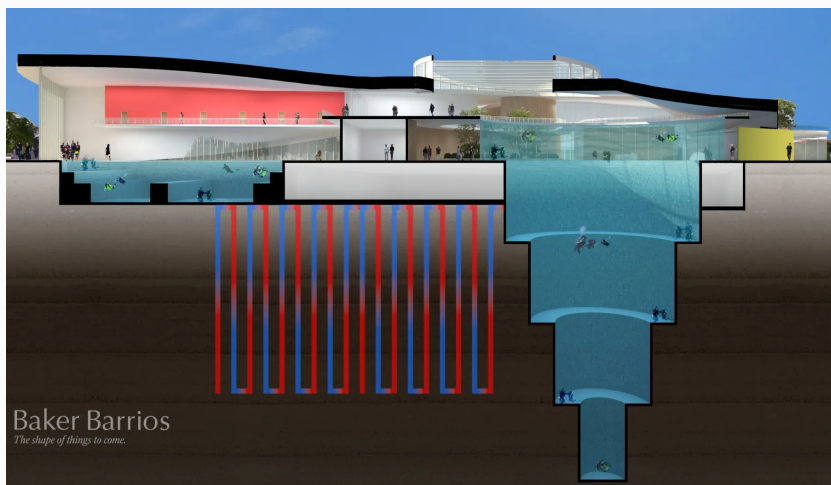


LAKE COUNTY NEWS-SUN

# Funds being raised to open country's deepest swimming pool in North Chicago; 'Oh my gosh, won't this be amazing'



This rendering shows the depth of the pool beneath the building.  
(Photo courtesy of Diveheart) – Original Credit: News-Sun

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By **STEVE SADIN** | Lake County News-Sun

PUBLISHED: February 16, 2024 at 2:10 p.m. | UPDATED: February 16, 2024 at 2:11 p.m.

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Within four years, the country's deepest swimming pool — 130 feet — is planned for North Chicago, and it will allow wheelchair users to stand on their own two feet.

For more than 25 years, Jim Elliott of Downers Grove has taught scuba diving to people with disabilities. He said he sees them jump into the water, breathe through the tank on their back and stand.

“It’s amazing,” Elliott said. “They feel like a superhero jumping off a building and hovering over an intersection. They’re able to get out of their wheelchair and stand. It gives them the feeling there isn’t anything they can’t do.”



The deepest pool in the United States — 130 feet — will be part of Diveheart’s planned North Chicago facility. (Photo courtesy of Diveheart)– Original Credit: News-Sun

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Teaching people with disabilities, as well as veterans with PTSD and others how to scuba dive, Elliott said he eventually began helping people on a global scale. In 2001, he founded Diveheart, a not-for-profit corporation devoted to the cause.

Elliott launched a \$300 million fundraising effort Thursday in Deerfield to build and endow Diveheart's three-pool adaptive scuba and scuba therapy facility in North Chicago, where divers will be able to descend 130 feet below the surface in a controlled environment.

Once the money is raised, Elliott said it will take two years to build the therapeutic diving center. He wants the funding for the organization in place both to build it, and create an endowment to assure everyone who can benefit is able.

"You have to have an endowment," he said. "We want to be able to give scholarships to those who need it. You can't do that without an endowment. Now is the time."

When finished, Elliott said the facility will have three pools. The 130-foot-deep swimming tank will give people an opportunity to experience deep-water diving, with water pressure similar to a more than 10-story depth, but without the chill of the deep or its currents.

There will also be what Elliott calls a "starter" pool, similar to what many high schools have. It will be a place where the youth of North Chicago and Waukegan can learn to swim. People can gain the basics of scuba diving there before going into the deep tank.

A third, 20-foot-deep, above-ground pool is also planned. It will be divided into two smaller sections and one larger one with tunnels, where Elliott said people can walk through and observe what is happening.

"It will be a showcase pool, like an aquarium," he said. "It will be like a classroom, where people can observe what's going on. The larger one will be an Olympic-(sized) diving pool."

One person thrilled with the latest addition coming to North Chicago is Mayor Leon Rockingham Jr. He said it will complement life science leaders already there like Abbott, AbbVie and Rosalind Franklin University.

"Oh my gosh, won't this be amazing," he said. "It's going to be a real showcase in North Chicago. It will bring the community something to help a lot of people, including our veterans."



With part of the pool above ground, visitors can see people swimming beneath the surface. (Photo courtesy of Diveheart)– Original Credit: News-Sun

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Kevin Considine, the president and CEO of Lake County Partners, said his organization helped Diveheart find the North Chicago location once they learned about the not-for-profit’s plan for the deep pool.

“They have a really unique niche and a great concept,” he said. “It’s really cool these folks are coming to Lake County. They fit in very well with places like Abbott, AbbVie and Rosalind Franklin. It’s a really cool idea.”

Seeing the boost wheelchair users and others with physical or other disabilities can do in the water, Elliott said he is looking forward to being able to help people in the facility.

“When they get into zero gravity, they start doing things they’ve never been able to do before,” he said. “This (deep) pool will make that happen for so many more people.”

Though there are four deeper pools in other parts of the world – the biggest one is 200 feet deep in Dubai –Tinamarie Hernandez, Diveheart’s executive director, said the one that will be built in North Chicago will be the deepest used for therapy.

“No one has ever done anything like this before,” Hernandez said. “The others are solely for recreational purposes.”

Elliott said in between therapy and classes, Diveheart’s pools may also be used for recreational purposes.