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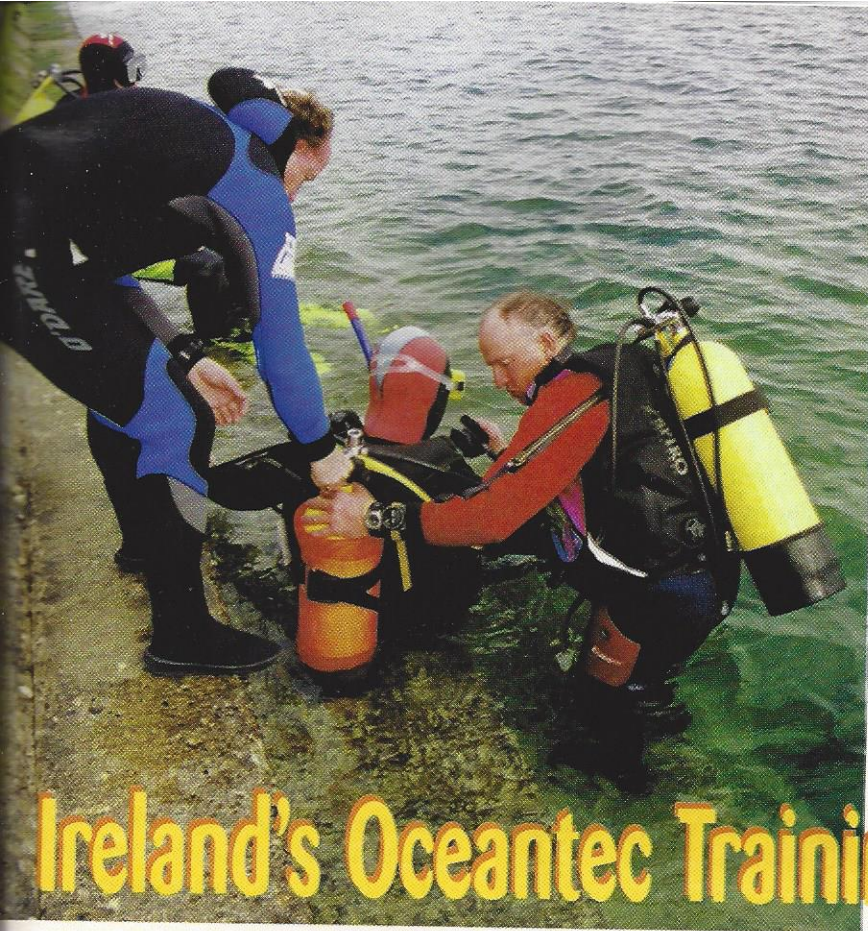
Fourth Quarter 1998

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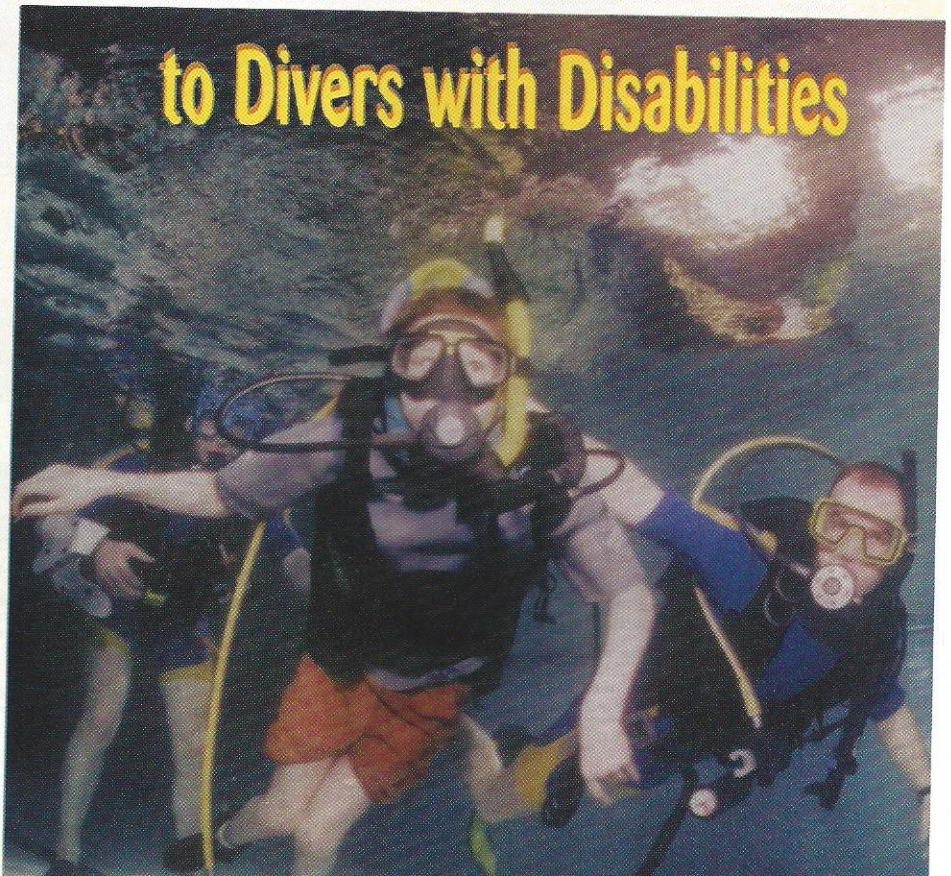


Ireland's Oceantec Training School Says

Fáilte (Welcome)

by Grace O'Malley

to Divers with Disabilities



T R A I N I N G

These days, the world is seeing a new Ireland – prosperous, vital and creative. And still more people are discovering that among Ireland’s diverse attractions, scuba diving ranks high on the list.

Most of Ireland’s population lives and works along the east coast, yet divers know most of the best diving is along the west coast. This geographical obstacle doesn’t faze people accustomed to hard work and patience.

But something was missing. Who was servicing the needs of divers with disabilities? With the help of the Electrical Supply Board, Oceantec Dive Shop and Training School took the initiative and offered Ireland’s first ever “Open Water Days” for people with disabilities in March 1997.

More than 30 people with disabilities showed up to give diving a try on those two days. PADI Instructor Dave Curtis spent more than a year putting

the event together and was pleased with its success. “I always wanted to work with the physically disabled. But I always knew there had to be specialized education to do so. How do you adapt different techniques to teach a student with a disability if you don’t have any background to work from?”

Curtis carefully considered his options for getting the skills he knew he’d need for the event. “When Bob Austen [PADI 67831, HSA 0984] sponsored an HSA Instructor Training Course (ITC) in the U.K., I said that’s it, that’s the opportunity.”

As a PADI Instructor, Curtis was accustomed to teaching within a standards system and was quick to recognize and appreciate the HSA’s standards system, their 17-year history and the more than 1300 instructors in



41 countries around the world. He returned from the ITC as an HSA Instructor, complete with the knowledge and credentials necessary to safely train student divers with disabilities.

Before beginning Oceantec’s Open Water Days for the Disabled event, Curtis anticipated its popularity. As the only HSA trained and certified instructor at Oceantec, Curtis knew he wouldn’t be able to handle 20-30 people with disabilities on his own. He decided to train seven people as HSA Dive Buddies. Curtis’ predictions proved accurate and news of the dive event for people with disabilities spread, as did the demand for more events like it. Later that summer, Cerebral Palsy Ireland (CPI) organized another Open Water Day and another 30 people rushed to attend. Oceantec staff later took 15 student divers for a supervised dive weekend. The student divers had all completed the pool session and were thrilled to experience ocean diving for the first time.

According to Curtis, he and everyone at Oceantec wanted to prove that diving is accessible and enjoyable for everyone. The next logical phase, then, was for other Oceantec Instructors to join him and become HSA Instructors. To that end, Curtis scheduled an HSA Instructor Training Course at Oceantec. Part of the training involved simulating visual and physical handicaps and learning how it feels to put one’s trust totally in another human being.

Others have joined Curtis in making diving more accessible to those with disabilities. Jim Corrigan, an HSA instructor and commercial fisherman is determined to convert one of

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Dive Days for Divers with Disabilities

his boats into one that is accessible for divers with disabilities or handicaps.

But Curtis deserves the highest praise. "More than anybody else this whole success rests very firmly on the shoulders of Dave Curtis. He's a man of commitment and he's been a tower of strength all the way through," says Willy Siddall, Oceantec's owner.

For more information about Dive Days for Divers with Disabilities, write Oceantec Dive Shop and Training School at 10 Marine Terrace, Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin, Ireland, phone at 01 280 1083 or fax at 01 284-3885. For more about HSA Training, contact the Handicapped Scuba Association Headquarters at 1104 E1 Prado, San Clemente, California 92672-4637, U.S.A, by phone/fax at +714-498-6128, email at hsahdq@compuserve.com or visit their web site at <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/hsahdq>. ♦

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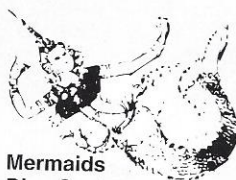
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