

Dive training will help disabled vets

By JoDee Brooke

Keith Cormican spent a recent weekend with several scuba divers training in the swimming pool at Lincoln High School in Alma Center. The training, called the Scubility Dive buddy certification program, is designed to develop the knowledge and necessary skills for an individual to effectively perform as a dive buddy for a physically disabled diver.

Cormican and fellow divers are preparing to answer a call for help from diver Todd Ehrhardt of Rockford, IL. Ehrhardt has made it his mission to enhance the lives of veterans. Scuba diving has been used to calm and relax dis-

abled individuals and has been used in therapeutic treatment of those with disabilities.

"I have a lot of love for the military, for our soldiers," shared Ehrhardt. "I have a brother who is a 10-year army veteran and an uncle who is a retired colonel. We hear about all these veterans getting hurt but never what's next for them as far as programs to help get them back in society."

So, in the past few weeks, Ehrhardt has been working hard to get the word out to veterans about the disabled vets dive. "I've spent \$60 on fliers," he said. "The rest has all been donated. I'm not a phone call type

of guy. The passion gets lost in a phone call. I meet with people to get the word out to veterans."

The dive event is not only for veterans but for their families, wife, girlfriend, father, mother, sons and daughters.

Ehrhardt knows diving, but he knew he would need additional help from other divers, so he gave Cormican, his friend and former instructor, a call. Cormican already has the certification required to assist disabled veterans. But, he knew they'd need more divers to help, so he arranged for the weekend training. Three divers from Illinois and three from Minnesota spent the weekend in the pool. Assisting Cormican was retired U.S. Navy physical therapist Lisa DePasquale.

"When working with a blind person, we rely on hand signals to communicate," explained Cormican. "When we push down on the palm, we go down. When we push up, we go up."

"This has been a real education for me," Ehrhardt, shared. "I chose Keith because I respect him and he taught me. Ego doesn't inspire people; the ability to give back does. It is my hope someone else would be inspired to do something nice for others."

The disabilities associated with spinal cord injuries seem to go away when the person is scuba diving. "We are all equal in the water," explained DePasquale. "We have to make sure they are weighted properly, and we have to be mindful of their particular disability. This training exposes dive buddy students to be aware of the



JoDee Brooke/Banner Journal

Kristy Anderson (l) played the role of a blind diver assisting a tired, excited diver needing help and played by Molly Schuneman. Both from Minnesota, the divers were in the area recently completing training with local diver Keith Cormican that will allow them to assist disabled veterans as they are given the opportunity to dive in a March 30 event in Illinois.

different equipment and precautions and the individuals specific disabilities and their dive capabilities within that disability."

Disabled veterans are invited to Ehrhardt's Discover Scuba for Disabled Vets event to be held March 30 at the Belvidere YMCA. Disabled veterans and their families will be able to train with skilled dive instructors following the certification training provided by Cormican.

Cormican and Ehrhardt are sharing their dive gear for the event. A team of 12 volunteers specifically trained to assist disabled veterans and their families and gear experts will be on hand to assist with the event. There are 15 participants currently signed up.



JoDee Brooke/Banner Journal

Illinois diver Todd Ehrhardt was trained by Keith Cormican. Ehrhardt and Cormican teamed up recently in the Lincoln High School pool to provide dive training specific to disabled divers. Ehrhardt explained the mask worn by paralyzed individuals who don't have use of their arms. "Sometimes, we take for granted being able to pinch our nose when we get plugged ears or being able to empty the water out of our mask," explained Ehrhardt. The mask addresses those concerns.



JoDee Brooke/Banner Journal

Keith Cormican, Black River Falls, has been diving for several years. He's been teaching dive courses for many years, as well. Cormican recently provided special training to several divers who will be assisting with a disabled veterans dive event in Belvidere, IL.

Hispanic and women farmers and ranchers claims must be postmarked by March 25

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack reminded Hispanic and women farmers and ranchers who allege discrimination by the USDA in past decades there are fewer than 30 days remaining in the filing period closing March 25.

The process offers a voluntary alternative to litigation for each Hispanic or female farmer and rancher who can prove that USDA denied his or her application for loan or loan servicing assistance for discriminatory reasons for certain time

periods between 1981 and 2000.

As announced in February 2011, the voluntary claims process will make available at least \$1.33 billion for cash awards and tax relief payments, plus up to \$160 million in farm debt relief, to eligible Hispanic and women farmers and ranchers. There are no filing fees to participate in the program.

Call center representatives can be reached at 1.888.508.4429. Claimants

may register for a claims package (by calling the number or visiting the website) or may download the forms from the website. All those interested in learning more or receiving information about the claims process and claims packages are encouraged to attend meetings in your communities about the claims process and contact the Web site at any time or the call center telephone number Monday through Friday 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Eastern Time.

Web site: www.farmer-claims.gov

Phone: 1.888.508.4429
Claims Period: Sept. 24, 2012 to March 25, 2013.

Independent legal services companies will administer the claims process and adjudicate the claims. Although there are no filing fees to participate, and a lawyer is not required to participate in the claims process, persons seeking legal advice may contact a lawyer or other legal services provider.

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