

What is ScubaJam?

What prompted ScubaJam: We all teach young people to dive, but young people have very limited ability to just enjoy going diving, particularly if you are talking about them going diving with their friends. Usually, opportunities for youth recreational diving are family-based which seldom involves youth outside a core family. Youth can't be expected to embrace diving as a personal lifestyle if it doesn't involve them being freed to just dive with their own friends.

What is ScubaJam: ScubaJam is designed to be an affordable and fun diving event for youth divers. It is peer based and socially oriented. Think of ScubaJam as an escorted group dive trip for youth with planned, but voluntary, activities and side trips. It's sort of like a PADI Diving Society - Total Submersion trip done locally for kids.

Training is not an objective of ScubaJam. A unit, dive shop or dive professional can train their trip participants at this event as they might when leading a trip to the islands. That training, however, will limit the diver's ability to participate in the scheduled ScubaJam fun activities.

ScubaJam activities themselves are designed to be educational, experiential and promote dive safety and good diving skills. There are awards and prizes based on good diving skills and habits. ScubaJam does not offer formal scuba training that would compete with any participating dive shop or dive professional.

What does ScubaJam provide? – Our ScubaJam begins on Friday evening of Labor Day weekend and units can arrive anytime on Friday and go diving if they wish. Entry with ScubaJam provides the participants with unlimited diving at the quarry from Friday through Monday with camping privileges and unlimited FREE air fills.

There is a welcome package that provides information, coupons and favors from supporting manufacturers, agencies, and other interested entities. There is also an event T-Shirt provided to every participant and an event recognition hat for all the unit leaders, the dive officers and supporting dive professionals.

Beginning on Saturday morning ScubaJam provides diving activities starting with a quarry orientation and dive, assistance with weighting and buoyancy tips. Throughout Saturday and Sunday we provide organized "challenge dives" such as navigation challenges, peak buoyancy challenges, search and recovery, etc. The final challenge is a treasure hunt which rewards divers for safe diving practices in addition to locating and recovering chips scattered throughout the challenge area. Mostly, it's about having fun going diving.

DAN and other organizations come and set up exhibits. There are presentations about technical diving, rebreathers, ROV's, etc. This year there will be a BSA Merit Badge station that will provide participants who are certified divers to complete the BSA Scuba Merit Badge requirements and receive their MB books, patches and completion cards onsite.

Closing ceremonies revolve around a cookout Sunday evening where we pass out awards and kudos and enjoy fellowship. Folks can leave at their discretion or stay and dive on Monday.

All programs are very laid back. Participants can participate or not. They can swim, snorkel, kayak and dive as they like under general supervision of their unit's dive officer supported by ScubaJam and quarry staff. When participating in a ScubaJam operated challenge they are formally checked into and out of the water.

What is the participant cost? – With the generous support of the quarry operator, we were able to charge only \$100 per youth participant and \$25 per adult leader. To encourage organized groups, we registered only by Unit and required a minimum of 6 paid participants and two adult passes (\$650 min per unit). For each additional 6 paid participants, we provide one

more adult pass for \$25. Dive professionals registered with a unit or helping to staff are FREE and receive free air fills for the weekend.

How We Got it Going: This first thing we did was to see if we could find the interest across a sufficiently broad operational and economic base to make the event feasible. Several of us, dive shop operators and instructors, had been working with scouts. So we polled our group informally and then began talking to other shops and scout groups. We talked to our local dive quarry operator and he too was favorable to the idea and wanted to help.

We scheduled a meeting and invited everyone that we thought might want to have input into the process. That first meeting was attended by 14 people. Quoting the minutes: *“Those in attendance represented 5 dive shops and 2 training agencies, the quarry operator, 6 different active crews and/or troops involved in scuba diving as well as a number of individuals active in Scouting leadership in 3 different Councils in Virginia.”* Link to minutes - (www.connect2diving.com/pdf/scubajam/minutes%20100106.pdf)

There was a lot to discuss during that meeting. We were trying to define what ScubaJam would be and who would control it or “own” it. We had no clear vision but that slowly evolved in the collaboration and the result of that collaboration is presented here. We are still, as a group, tweaking and refining the event and its formal but mostly informal organization.

Dive Venue and Date of the Event: The first order of business was to find a date for the event. We most certainly had a consensus venue. We chose Labor Day weekend principally because that was a slow weekend for the quarry operator and we were offered better pricing concessions and support of the event. There are advantages and disadvantages for any date selected; ultimately, you just pick one.

As an aside, the quarry operator reported that ScubaJam made the weekend the highest grossing Labor Day weekend they had ever had; a slow weekend turned profitable and a fantastic deal for the kids and their parents.

The ScubaJam Organizational Structure: Although we discussed organizing as a formal scout registered/operated activity under the auspices of a BSA Council, we ultimately decided to make this event “owned” as it were by the members of the committee which essentially were dive shops owners and dive professionals. We wanted and continue to want to create a strong relationship with the BSA administrative structure and to market the event to individual scout units as “Scout Friendly”. That may change in time, but has seemed to fit us best to this point.

Our aim is to support the diving community and promote scuba diving as a healthy, energizing, conservation oriented and outdoor activity. We embrace everyone seeking to do the same. We want the support of all dive shops, certification agencies, dive professionals (shop affiliated or independent), the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and any other organization supporting youth and scuba, and also every other facet of the dive industry.

We want to foster a spirit of harmony and general goodwill within the dive community. Everyone interested in ScubaJam is welcome at our committee meetings and is invited to take an active role in helping to develop and to participate in the event.

ScubaJam Markets to Shops and Units: To make the event successful, we need to involve a large group of youth divers. We want to reach out to cohesive groups of youth to establish a significant core of participation.

Scout Troops, Districts and Councils
GSA Troops and others

Dive Shops and scuba camps
Dive Operators
Dive Professionals
Scouters (Scout leaders)

ScubaJam Committee is a scout-friendly, independent organization. Many of our members and active volunteers are also scouts and are active with individual units and BSA leadership. As an organization, the ScubaJam committee markets the event to dive shops and scouting units and not to the scouts individually.

We seek to support the dive community by supporting the existing dive training structure which is the dive shops and dive professionals. We look to these folks for funding and operational support. We want to direct individuals to the shops and dive professionals for training, supervision assistance, rental gear, purchase of gear, etc.

Unit Registration: We require that every youth participant be registered and participating at the event as a member of a scout troop, crew or other unit. We register the units and list their participants. Each unit is specifically responsible under their charter to adhere to scout standards including: tour permits, youth protection, two deep leadership, appropriately segregated overnight accommodations, etc. ScubaJam simply provides a venue and activities. We do attempt to understand all of the scouting requirements and make it as easy as possible for the units to meet their obligations.

Unit Dive Officer Required: Additionally, each unit must have on its roster a “dive officer” and we require him to have current professional credentials. The dive officer is generally responsible for the control of the diving operations of all members of the unit.

Most units involved in scuba have relationships with dive professionals and shops to get their people trained. Many units involved with scuba diving have dive professionals as scout leaders and if not, their local supporting dive shop is usually most happy to provide a leader who may very well do some limited training during the event. There is no charge to attend the event for any dive professional registered with a unit.

ScubaJam’s Direct Marketing Efforts: We have a website (www.scubajam-va.org) and Facebook page (www.facebook.com/ScubaJamVirginia). We pay for Facebook advertizing of our page. The page and the site refer inquiries by individuals to sponsoring shops and to BSA units that are registered to attend. We hope to provide a resource to point individuals to shops and BSA units, BSA Units to shops and shops to BSA Units in their area.

This year ScubaJam is trying to create direct liaisons for each of the BSA Councils in Virginia to help disseminate information about ScubaJam down to the Districts, Aquatic Committees and Troops and Crews. We believe what we do fits their programming goals. We fit their “non-profit” requirements and we do what we can to help them see that and encourage and help them get the word out.

ScubaJam emails meeting minutes, updates, printable flyers, brochures and anything else we think might be of use or interest to every dive shop that we can identify in the states of Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina and the District of Columbia. We solicit all shops to participate in ScubaJam and to become cash sponsors of ScubaJam. This funding allows us to keep entry fees very low and allows us to meet various operating costs. The shop receives listings and recognition on the ScubaJam website and wherever we can recognize them.

ScubaJam contacts Manufacturers and other industry stakeholders to solicit their support both in direct funding and through gifts in kind to serve as awards, prizes and favors for participants, providing and manning exhibits and whatever might serve the ScubaJam mission and that of the sponsor.

ScubaJam uses surplus funding to create continuing education scholarships for participants. These scholarships can be redeemed by the recipient through any accredited dive shop or dive professional.

Dive Shops market with ScubaJam: Establishing a program catering to scouts is not an easy task for any shop. It takes passion and focus. It takes energy, commitment and patience. ScubaJam itself is not a program, but an event.

ScubaJam hopefully can be a focal point for the shop trying to create a scout program or in generating more enthusiasm for an existing program. It is a beacon promising young divers that they are going to have some fun going diving instead of just listening to white-haired dive gurus control their fun or just hanging out with the “rents” and the kid sister or brother.

To successfully market to the youth market, dive shops and dive professionals must become involved directly in marketing programming to local troops and crews. Shops need to attend district roundtables, sponsor crews, and visit other troops, crews, high schools and others to talk about diving and do everything else they can do to create relationships with young divers.

ScubaJam just wants these young divers to apply their skills and enthusiasm to going diving with their friends. We hope they will go to BSA Sea Base and go with their unit aboard Blackbeards and go diving with their family on vacation. ScubaJam can, however, give them an affordable opportunity to go have fun diving with their friends least once every year.

Shops should train their scout units for ScubaJam. The shop should get them to be Open Water Divers and even become advanced divers before they come to ScubaJam. In the future we hope to hold “Rescue” and “Divemaster” stations to acquaint youth with the skills and objective of these programs and encourage them to pursue them with their dive center.

Shops should outfit their scout units for ScubaJam. Sell then or rent them gear. Our quarry operator provides all the air they can breathe and will provide rental gear as necessary at ½ price for participants during the event, but the intent is not to interfere with the shops’ relationships with their customers.

What happened last year: Here is the link to the ScubaJam 2010 report (www.connect2diving.com/pdf/scubajamreport.pdf). Take a look. There is a lot of information in it about what we did, who was involved and even a thorough disclosure of the financial structure.

Another document you might find helpful is our Leader’s Guide. This is a document most scout leaders will ask you for so that they can plan their trip in accordance with scouting requirements. (www.scubajam-va.org/files/SJ-VA_2011/Scuba_Rawlings_leaders_Application2011.doc)

Thank You: I have been very privileged to be involved in the development of this idea and event and to have had the benefit of the most caring and enthusiastic energies of so many generous members of the diving community; some that I knew prior and others that I met during the process.

What has been truly inspirational is that we have had broad personal and financial support from all areas of the dive community. We have had financial support, from people and shops that couldn’t be there, did not send people due to promotional restrictions and conflicting commitments and could not have immediately or tangibly benefited from this event. Nonetheless, they gave money and well wishes. We thank them all. They unselfishly validate this event and its prospects for the future.

In a real sense, ScubaJam being included in this PADI webinar is also testimony to this promise and challenge. We thank PADI for their generously and quickly offered support to our initial event.

Please let me know if you would like to be listed to receive ongoing information on ScubaJam Virginia. Don't forget to "like" the Facebook page too.

Best of luck to everyone.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chip".

Chip Earle

Dive Connections – www.connect2diving.com

Email – chip@seadevil.net

Cell – 434-242-1142