

THE REEF SEEKER



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CHAMBER DAY 2022 RAISES \$176,144

The annual fund-raiser for the USC Catalina Hyperbaric Chamber was held this year on May 4, 2022, and was again a resounding success, raising \$176,144 which is a new record for the event. The Chamber relies on outside public donations for roughly 55% of the annual operating budget, so Chamber Day plays a major role in keeping the Chamber on solid financial footing.

The organizers, all members of the Southern California Diving community working in co-ordination with Chamber Director Karl Huggins, call this as the largest single-day scuba charity event in the United States (and perhaps even the world) as close to 1,000 people get involved when you factor in all the participants, donors, and volunteers. Donors can register for the in-person parts of the event or make a direct contribution through what's called the Chamber Challenge.

The day started off with 111 divers boarding eight different dive boats to make the journey from Los Angeles to Catalina, where they did two dives and came onto the WIES campus for a walking tour of the Chamber as well as enjoying short talks from various first-responder rescue personnel, including Baywatch, L.A. County Sheriffs, and L.A. Port Police. To top things off, the U.S. Coast Guard flew one of their rescue helicopters in so divers could get a look at that and talk with USCG crew.

114 people who couldn't participate in-person for the dive signed up for the *Flying Dutchman*, the mythical fake boat for the event, which allows people to join the "crew" of the Dutchman and even submit their pirate name.

The Chamber Challenge is a key driver of the success of the event and this year 158 people made direct contributions which totaled an amazing \$120,290. The individual donations ranged from \$25 to \$13,500 with \$100 being the most common donation amount.

The culmination of the event is an evening affair hosted by the Aquarium of the Pacific in Long Beach where 269 people (plus another fifty or so volunteers) gathered for a sit-down dinner in the Great Hall of the Aquarium. During the evening, raffle prizes were awarded, recognitions were made, short presentations on diving were given, and the evening culminates in announcing the final total for event with a presentation of a mock check to Chamber Director Karl Huggins by event chair Ken Kurtis.

As this is an annual event, Chamber Day 2023 will be held on May 3 next year.

ANNUAL LONG BEACH SCUBA SHOW A SUCCESS

The annual Scuba Show was once again, like Chamber Day, live and in-person and was held May 14-15 at the Long Beach Convention Center. Although official attendance isn't out yet, it seemed to everyone I talked to like the show was busier than it has been, especially on Saturday. This makes perfect sense when you realize there's a pent-up demand within divers to go diving and this presented among the first large-scale opportunities to make that happen.

There were plenty of travel providers there and all of their booths seemed well-attended. The seminars were also well-attended. I personally gave two and had about 40 people for my 11AM Saturday talk on diving with Whale Sharks at Isla Mujeres (normally we get about 20 people for the 11AM slots) and we had around 120 people attended the "Why Divers Die" panel discussion at the end of Saturday (once again, the #1-attended seminar for the show).

So it's certainly nice to see everyone so excited about getting wet again and hopefully we'll be able to provide you with some more opportunities to do that in 2022. We'll be running our monthly mid-week day trips to Avalon throughout the summer, have Vets Park shore dives scheduled here and there, are offering a number of classes (mostly through Zoom), have Zoom Seekers scheduled each month, and also hope to schedule a foreign trip (or maybe even two) before the end of the year.



DR. BILL CELEBRATION OF LIFE

On Sunday June 12, there will be a celebration of life for Dr. Bill Bushing that will be held at the Avalon Underwater Park starting at 11AM. There will be some people speaking, an opportunity for attendees to share any Dr. Bill experiences or stories that they have, and afterwards, for those choosing to do so, there will be a dive in Dr. Bill's memory. It's all fairly informal and for those who can't attend, plans are being made to live-stream the event through Dr. Bill's FaceBook page. For those attending, since Bill loved Hawaiian shirts and his blue wetsuit, you're asked to wear something Hawaiian or blue.

ZOOM SEEKERS – TUESDAY, JUNE 14

Our June speaker will be Nancy Caruso, the founder of and guiding force behind Get Inspired, a 501(c)(3) organization whose goal is to get kids excited about and inspired about the ocean. They're also involved in a number of things for adult volunteers, like kelp restoration and abalone replanting projects.

As with all Zoom Seekers meetings, we'll start at 7:30PM and have time for Q&A following the meeting. We'll be done no later than 9PM. Keep an eye open for TWARS on June 12 as that's where you'll find the URL link so you can join us for this. Hope to see you there.



2022 DIVING VACATIONS

Where else can we go???

Fall (?) • Indonesia

Also fall • Yap (?)

Other suggestions?

BONAIRE 2022 MINI TRIP REPORT

(I will send out the full version later this week but here are some highlights.)

This was our 18th trip to Bonaire and our first since 2018. For about the last twenty years or so, we've always stayed at Buddy Dive (which is right next to Sand Dollar) and which is currently probably the largest dive operation on the island of Bonaire.

A lot of what makes diving a specific site in Bonaire special or not is based on what critters you find on the dive. The late Buddy Dive guide extraordinaire Murph Henar used to refer to them as his "special friends." Usually that meant a seahorse or a frogfish, but it could also be a Tarpon, Spotted Drums in adult or juvy phases (and we had more of both on this trip than I think I've ever seen before), squid, turtles, and a host of others.

There's even a site called Something Special (which was also one of Murph's favs). The way it got its name is because of a bootleg liquor that was produced there called "Something Special" but the site really is a special one to dive and we were able to hit it on a very good day.

Something Special is immediately south of the entrance to the Harbor Village Marina. That means you need to be aware of boat traffic when you dive it – even though from a boat you're tied to a mooring – because some boaters simply aren't paying attention to divers.

But the site certainly lived up to its name for us. One thing I really wanted to find – and which I'd seen there and only there before – was a small colorful Angelfish

UPCOMING LOCAL DIVES & CLASSES

DAY	DATE	BOAT/SITE	PLANNED DESTINATION	PRICE
Thu.	June 2	Redondo (Vets)	••• Night Dive •••	\$30
Sat.	4	Redondo (Vets)	Navigation (single tank)	\$30
Wed.	8	Catalina Express	Avalon U/W Park (3 dives)	\$170
Wed.	22	--- CLASS ---	--- NAUI Nitrox ---	\$95
Thu.	July 7	Redondo (Vets)	••• Night Dive •••	\$30
Sat.	9	Redondo (Vets)	Mastering Surf Entries & Exits	\$30
Wed.	20	Catalina Express	Avalon U/W Park (3 dives)	\$170
Wed.	27	--- CLASS ---	--- Secrets of Fish ID ---	\$30

called a Cherub Angelfish. They're generally at this site around 90 feet deep, they're maybe half an inch long, they constantly flit around the rubble bottom making them really difficult to shoot, but their coloration is gorgeous with a predominantly bright blue body, a yellow face, and a bright blue ring around their eyes. When I've gone to find them in the past, I've seen maybe five or six individuals. This time, there were dozens and dozens of them.

Back to our Something Special dive, the other nice thing we can guarantee seeing there is a field of Garden Eels, also down in the 70-90 foot area. You start the dive from the mooring line and descend towards them. If you move slow and stay low, they don't immediately all retreat into their holes in the sand. The Garden Eels also mark the spot when you turn left and then cruise the front side of the site, seeing many of the usual critters. We found a huge Green Moray Eel, plenty of large orange Elephant Ear sponges, Goatfish, Azure Vase sponges, Lizardfish, Rock Hinds, and more.

When you make the turn at the halfway point of the dive ("spin the dive" is a phrase we use to indicate you're going to go back the way you came, but at a shallower depth), now you start to see Giant Anemones (I've also seen them called Bulb Anemones) in

the 20-30 foot range. Within the tentacles of those anemones reside various species of teeny shrimp including Pederson's Cleaner Shrimp as well as Squat Anemone Shrimp (aka "Sexy Shrimp" because they advertise their cleaning services and availability by seductively waving their arches tails).

But then, as you find yourself under the mooring buoy and your boat, you cross a sand channel to a rock wall that has tons of juvies and other small fish that use the place like a nursery and which could really be a dive all unto itself.

So for all kinds of reasons, Something Special really is something special.

The Buddy Dive house reef is no slouch either and we dove that plenty. You kick out from the dock and as the reef slopes down at a depth of around 35 feet, you choose to either go left or right. To the left is more of a wall-ish dive and to the right is more slope-y. We had excellent dives in both directions including squid (to the right near the bow of the Machaca wreck) and huge Tarpon during the day (to the left). No matter which direction you choose, it's a dive that doesn't disappoint.

We definitely saved the best for last. Dive guide Aitzel was pretty sure he could find a Frogfish at a

spot on Klein called Mi Dushi which, in the local language, means “My love” or “My sweet.” It’s a term of endearment. This was also going to be Laurie Kasper’s 500th dive so we thought what better way to commemorate that than with a special friend?

Along the way, we had a very pleasant drift and saw the usual creatures. And then, 36 minutes in – VOILA!!! – Aitzel triumphantly and excitedly pointed out the Frogfish. As you’ll see from the pictures, once you knew he was there, he was fairly easy to see. He was large for a Frogfish, about the size of your palm and out-stretched fingers. Sometimes, these fish can be REALLY small and REALLY well-camouflaged which makes them very hard to spot. But our

guy was perched very nicely so he was easy to distinguish from the sponge that provided him cover.

He tolerated our gaggle of divers very well. Many times when Frogfish realize they’ve been spotted, they may move off and try to find another spot. Not this guy. He stayed plastered against the side of the sponge. At one point he turned himself 180 degrees, and then a little later turned himself back. And that action allowed those watching to see why Frogfish are sometimes also referred to as Handfish because his pectoral fins are like little hands that he uses to brace himself against the sponge and, when need be, to “walk” to a new spot.

So we were able to spend the last 24 minutes of the dive with him

alternately taking turns to get a good close look, or fire off a few shots, or take a short video. There was also a lot of other stuff to see in the shallows – like Barnacle Blennies, Flamingo Tongues, and more – but the Frogfish was certainly the highlight of the dive and maybe even the trip.

So overall, a really nice trip. The diving is good if not spectacular and doesn’t disappoint. Buddy Dive runs a really to-notch operation and they’ll try to honor whatever request you have. And especially when you realize that many of you haven’t been diving in two years or so due to the pandemic, going to a place like Bonaire – and specifically Buddy Dive – might be just the tonic you need to get your diving back up to speed.

PICTURE PAGE - BONAIRE 2022

(All pix by Ken Kurtis © 2022)



**Requisite
Flamingos**



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**Flamingo
Tongue**



**Spotted Drum
(adult)**



**Christmas Tree Worms
are everywhere**



**Frogfish
(note the "hands")**