Scuba diving isn't easy. There is a lot to learn, a lot of information to absorb, and a lot of skills to practice.

I’m in my second week of Scuba diving training with the Scuba Center and Outdoor Rec—a new business that just opened in Solomons. Fred Lyles, owner and instructor, is taking my class through a step-by-step process, which is required to obtain an open water diving certification.

Fred has been diving since 1975. He became an instructor in 1988 while he was a firefighter in Prince George's County. Once he became an instructor, he lead the Underwater Rescue and Recovery Team in Prince George's County. Fred retired from the fire department in 2009 after 29 years of service.

“Owning a dive shop is something I've always wanted to do. It was always a dream of mine because I really, really enjoy teaching diving.” Fred admitted after he retired he thought that dream would never come true. “I kind of gave up on that dream but then this dive shop became available and I got the approval from my wife. She said ‘go for it!’”

With the help of his wife, Beverly, and his son, Fred Jr., Fred made that dream become a reality. While Bev is a certified open water diver herself, she handles the business side of the shop. “I'm in the behind-the-scenes operation of the business--I manage the money.” Bev has a master's degree in administrative science. “I have experience running programs and budgets. Even though I haven't run a retail store the combination of our skills make it possible to operate this business.”

Their son, Fred Jr., handles the marketing and social media aspect of the dive shop. Fred said the family’s mission is simple, “Our goal is to give people a good quality product at a good price.”

Part of that quality product includes the two week open water diving course. Fred prefers to spread out the classroom and pool work in an effort to not bombard students with too much information in a short amount of time. “I don't like the weekend classes because you pack in a lot of information in a very short amount of time. I don't feel that produces the best divers.”

Fred said he wants to feel he has taught his divers everything he can to be the best divers they can be. “I want them to be safe and it’s my name that goes on their certification.”

After the open water course is completed, certified divers can move on to other classes, such as advanced open water diving, night diving, and wreck diving to name a few.

I have had the pleasure of participating in the first Scuba diver certification class since the store opened. We have classroom work, which consists of reading our dive manual and watching an instructional video. The course covers everything from how our bodies react while underwater to assembling our equipment to underwater emergency situations. After each class, we take a quiz. At the end of the course we will be required to take a final exam.

Unfortunately, due to scheduling conflicts with the pool and issues with Mother Nature, we weren't able to get in the water during the first week of class. We're playing a lot of catch up this week to make sure we're prepared for our open water dive this weekend at Lake Phoenix in Virginia.

Scuba diving requires concentration, patience and fighting many of your body’s natural instincts. Many of the skills we’re learning will become muscle memory and second nature as we become more comfortable under the water. We’re learning how to recover our regulators should they come out of our mouth, clearing our masks in the event they fill with water, how to recover and clear our masks if they come off in the water, how to become neutrally buoyant while in the water—and the big one—relying on your dive buddy to help you while you’re under the water.

Fred said if you're not sure if you would enjoy Scuba diving, you can take a Discover Scuba course. “It’s a four hour course where you learn the basics and you get in the pool to experience diving for the first time.” Fred said this allows people the opportunity to decide if they’d like to continue diving. “People are afraid to pay the money upfront for a full blown certification class in case they don’t like it. This takes that pressure off.”

Scuba Center and Outdoor Rec doesn’t just offer classes and sell diving merchandise, they also fill tanks and service equipment. Bev said, “I like to tell people that we also do fun—we want you to have fun.” How do they accomplish that? “The store also arranges diving trips. This fall there is a group heading to Grand Cayman for a week of underwater adventures.” Bev explained.

Fred encourages you to come in and take a look around. “I don’t believe in high pressure sales. I like to treat people how I like to be treated.” Fred said he and his staff are there to answer your questions and talk to you about everything they have to offer.

“Scuba is so relaxing—it’s the only place you can go and you can leave this planet without leaving the planet. You get to interact with marine life and it’s a whole different world.” Fred explained.

If you’d like to learn more about the classes offered or about the shop itself, click here.

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