

Scuba shop succeeds in landlocked town

By Greg Avery
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Walk into one Fifth Street store in Frederick and you can almost feel the sea breeze and hear the lapping of ocean surf.

The nearest bodies of water are swimming pools, fishing ponds and irrigation ditches, but the town still harbors a business where people long to swim beneath

the waves and explore the ocean among the fish and sea creatures.

The Scuba Shack has been a wonder to locals since opening a year ago.

A scuba diving store in a small, landlocked former mining town?

It seems like a fish out of water, but the store is not only surviving - it's doing better than even its owners expected.

"I thought we wouldn't make a profit for the first four years. Now I'm just laughing," said Matt Kramer of Boulder, who's been diving since the early 1980s and is one of the Scuba Shack's six owners.

With a full line of scuba gear, the store can outfit someone for scuba diving, but the Tri-towns don't generate many impulse buyers.

The store's bread and butter is introducing novices to the wonders of the underwater world.

It's also how its owners came together.

All were former students of Kramer who were so taken with scuba diving that they jumped at the chance to get involved in the store.

Each has another full-time job, but works to keep the store open for three hours on weekday evenings and helps with lessons in Frederick or Longmont swimming pools.

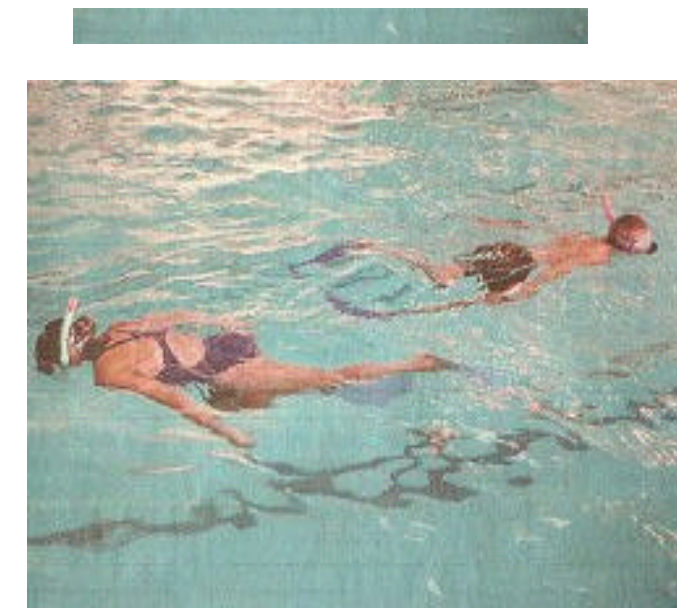
The Scuba Shack certifies about eight novice divers a month.

For Gary Boyer, a Longmont resident and IBM employee who joined the ownership team in April, it's a way to get more involved with his hobby.

"I'm here because I love to dive. We all are," he said. "I started stopping out at the store more and more, and I realized this is something I wanted to do."

The Scuba Shack was mostly the brainchild of Kramer, an experienced certified diving and water safety instructor.

After years of teaching others and arranging trips on the side, the idea of starting a store came together when



A SCUBA DIVING store in a small, landlocked former mining town? Although the Scuba Shack may seem like a fish out of water in Frederick, not only is it surviving, it's doing better than even its owners expected. Above, one of the owners and diving instructors, Matt Kramer, helps Ashley Young with her scuba gear. Left, Young and her brother, Travis Young, snorkel by each other during a scuba lesson.

Times-Call photos by
Tricia McInroy

he realized the Tri-town area was accessible to large numbers of customers.

With the help of a friend in real estate, he found the vacant Frederick store.

He collaborated with former diving students Bob and Lori Young, Russ Crystal, and Lawrence Jenkins to buy the shop and get the Scuba Shack going.

Kramer said he loves the people in the Tri-town area, but despite their warmth, some residents were skeptical.

"We were fixing up the store and guys came out and told me I'd never make it. That's the wrong thing to tell me," he said. "I'm not going to make \$100,000 a year teaching scuba diving in Frederick. That's the beauty of it - we don't have to."

His business revolves around novice divers becoming enamored with the underwater world.

He made a convert out of Frederick resident Cheryl

Jennings, a billing administrator for Longmont physicians.

Her husband, Gary, dives for the West Metro Fire Rescue team and the Denver area Metro Dive Team and he bought her lessons as a surprise gift last fall.

After 20 hours of classroom and swimming pool lessons, she completed her open water training with Kramer and Gary at the popular Blue Hole, N.M., diving spot, an 80-foot-deep natural spring where many divers get certified.

The water, the rock overhangs, the fish - it all amazed Jennings, and she was hooked on diving.

"I guess you could say it's terrifying and absolutely amazing at the same time," she said, adding that overcoming the fear is part of the attraction. "I think the biggest thing you learn is the confidence. You've got to keep your mind sharp ... If you relax and have fun with it, it makes all the difference in the world."