

Legends of diving to be honoured

By K. NANCOO-RUSSELL
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Some 12 persons who were instrumental in revolutionizing the sport of diving are in Grand Bahama this week for the Legends of Diving event being held at the International Underwater Explorers Society (UNEXSO) facility.

The event, which begins today and runs until April 6, is aimed at bringing worldwide attention to a number of unsung heroes who dedicated their lives to scuba diving.

Among the legends who will be honoured are Robert Croft, Nick Icorn, Dottie Frazier, Dr. Jose Jones and Alec Pierce.

Divers Ben Rose, who discovered Ben's Cavern located in the Lucayan National Park; John Englander, former owner of UNEXSO and Dr. John Clement, who was in charge of the hyperbaric chamber and one of the original founders of UNEXSO, will also be on-hand.

Bahamian divers Nick Rolle, Joel Pratt, Presley Knowles and Ollie Ferguson will share their stories about the history of diving on Grand Bahama Island.

Keith Cooper, UNEXSO Director of Sales & Marketing explained that the idea is to use the event to thank the men and women who have made invaluable contributions and risked their lives to improve the sport of diving.

Jeff Rice, who started the legends of diving event said it is also used to educate students about the history of the sport and about the current standards in the industry now.

During the program, students in the marine science program at St. Georges and Jack Hayward High Schools will be enlightened about the contributions of both U.S. and Baham-

ian diving legends that helped to shape the early developments of scuba diving, underwater photography, cave diving, marine research and animal identification while receiving instruction in diving.

"It is our hope that this event will inspire the next generation of divers to become professionals who will eventually teach new divers and to carry forward the legacy left behind by these great men and women who are joining us for this historic gathering of diving legends," said Rice.

Dave Woodward, the first manager of UNEXSO, who has been scuba diving since 1954, said he believes the sport has evolved over the years and is now considered a mainstream resort activity.

"It's grown tremendously as far as the interest. When we initially started, only the man that would wear black leather jackets would dive because it was dangerous and everybody was going to drown and it had just taken us a long time to lose that image," he said.

"There are not many of us that get to pioneer a special resort sport of any sort so I feel tremendously fortunate."

Another legend, Dr. Albert Jose Jones said it was especially important that the legends have the chance to pass on their knowledge to the younger generation.

"I had the opportunity as a youngster just like these young kids here to hear somebody talk about marine science and oceanography at my particular junior high school in Washington D.C. and that's what got me started," he explained.

Jones founded the first black diving organization the Underwater Adventure Seeker Scuba Diving Club in Washington D.C. in 1959, and noted that it is now celebrating its fiftieth anniversary.



LIVING LEGENDS – Six of the pioneers of diving who are on Grand Bahama this week for the International Legends of Diving, which will take place at The Underwater Explorer's Society (UNEXSO), pictured from left are Dr. Albert Jones, founder of the first black diving organization; Dottie Frazier, first female instructor; Dave Woodward, first manager of UNEXSO; Nick Teorn, first CEO of PADI; Bob Croft, former Navy diver and World Free Diving Record Holder; and Alec Pierce, largest sea hunt memorabilia collector.

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