

# Jim Bram

A talk with NAUI's president

Text by Peter Symes  
All photos courtesy of NAUI

## Where is NAUI heading?

NAUI turns 50. Are the founding principles still valid half a century later, have they changed, and how does the organization plan to evolve in the next 50?

NAUI was formed 1959 in support of its members training the public to safely dive anywhere in the world. That is a goal that will be valid as long as there are people who desire quality training when learning to scuba dive.

What do you see as the main challenge lying ahead for the dive industry?

Surviving the current economic downturn will be the most significant issue for each of the diving community stakeholders, i.e. retailers, resorts and live-aboards, manufacturers, training organizations and publications, to address in the short term. I am pleased with our financial position and brand strength as there is always a flight to quality during tough economic times. I believe we will do well as the corrections in the global markets work themselves out.

In the longer view, the diving community should look to rekindling our "adventure" reputation amongst the younger generations that we once enjoyed. When divers were viewed as explorers and risk takers, the diving community competed well with mountain

biking, skiing, and other outdoor pursuits. I believe the community is being disserved by promoting the perception that scuba diving is something anyone can do as one of many distractions while on a tropical vacation. While it may be true that anyone can learn to dive, passionate divers are the engine driving the growth of the community. These are the people we should be celebrating and courting for the future of our sport.

How is NAUI going to address these issues and work with the industry?

I believe I've answered the first challenge, and as to the second, we are excited to be celebrating our 50th anniversary of "diver development" rather than just certifying course completers. We're excited by our continuing corporate alliances with Walt Disney World Resorts and NASA's Neutral Buoyancy Laboratory and their environmental and youth outreach programs. We are proud to work with groups like Scubanauts International who are also partnering with NASA, NOAA and the National Marine Sanctuaries Program cooperating in outreach to middle and high schools here in the United States using NAUI scuba diver training to foster a love of science and the aquatic environment and produce future generations of diving leaders and scientists.

There is also a newly formed program called Oceans for Life with the US Government, NASA, National Geographic and NAUI using a similar concept with NAUI scuba diver training to foster aquatic awareness and respect to many visiting families of the coalition partner nations of the Middle East. Our corporate offices

in the Pacific Rim have conducted many marine enrichment programs for youth in Hong Kong, Palau and Malaysia to name just a few. Members in Kuwait were celebrated recently when they were awarded the NAUI Environmental Enrichment Award for their successful completion of the largest artificial reef ball installation in the world.

The population of scuba divers seems to have gotten pretty gray in the top. We are evidently facing a generation gap and recruitment challenge. How do we best reach out to the younger generation and get them engaged in diving?

This is not a new or significantly unusual observation that each generation in a community inevitably faces. The founding generation of the diving community began retiring from leadership positions as little as a decade ago, and many are still in ownership or senior management positions, which is not surprising in a community that formed only 50 years ago. It is not unusual to see elders in top management positions in any business community and can just as easily be characterized as a sign of a healthy maturing business that can support participants into their retirement years. As I said

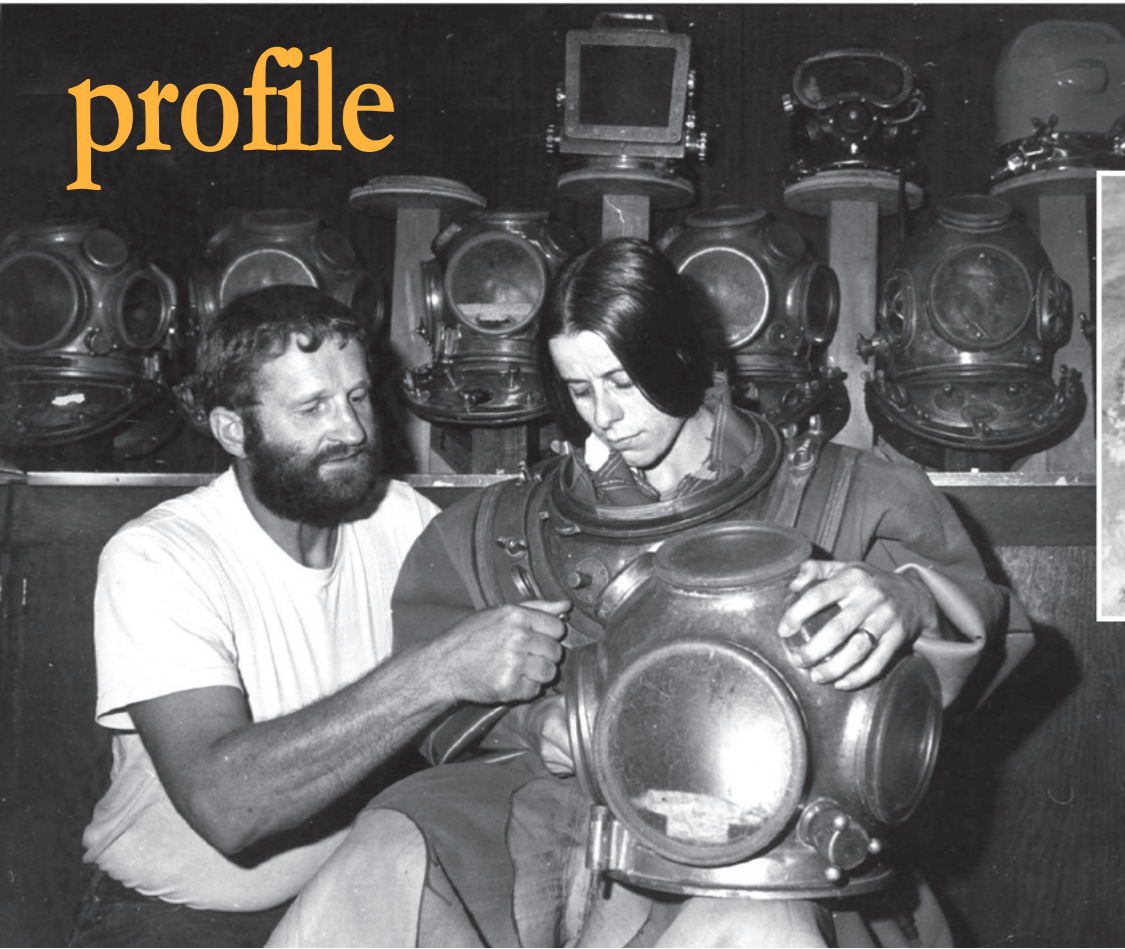
*We are excited to be celebrating our 50th anniversary of "diver development" rather than just certifying course completers.*



NAUI President, Jim Bram at his desk



## Jim Bram



THIS PAGE: Historical images from NAUI archives

before, there is no shortage of focus or effort on reaching out to younger generations.

Does the recreational diving industry have enough competitive strength on today's frantic market?

There will be some casualties, and no brand or company can be considered immune. However, as long as there is an interest in learning to dive, or vacationers looking for something extra in their adventures, there will be a diving community to support it and a need to be trained to safely participate.

What do you see as the main competition or threats?

This may seem like a theme but

I believe that if we continue to dilute the image of scuba diving as an adventurous pursuit, then younger generations will start seeking other activities that are perceived as being more "out on the edge." The proliferation of training companies and dilution of quality training as they compete for a shrinking piece of a contracting market is worrisome because of the desperate measures some will resort to, and all too often, educational shortcuts can fuel frustrated participants at best and produce a negative word-of-mouth advocate at worst.

What is so great about

diving anyway?

For those who are adequately trained, it is a serene experience of weightlessness in a wild environment with alien-looking creatures doing strange things and new wonders around every outcropping. It is a shared experience with dive partners and fellow divers who, in their everyday lives, may be scientists, CEOs, university students or carpenters chattering about the most

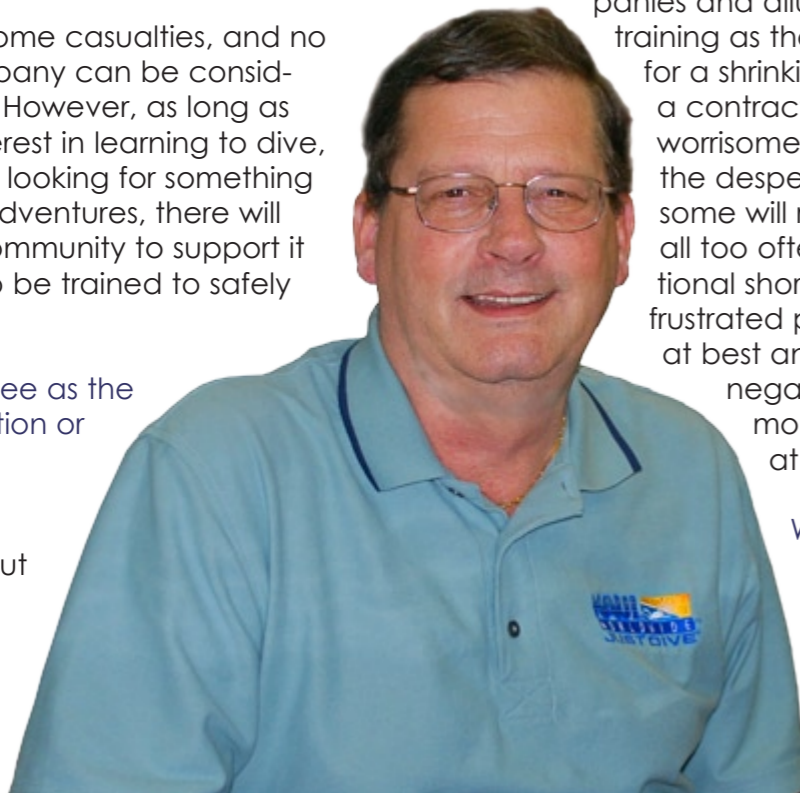
amazing sights just witnessed on the most recent dive. It is the ride aboard the dive charter that can be a wonderful sunny day or a night ride in wild seas pitching to and fro until the lee shore of an island is reached and anchors are set in preparation for the day's diving. It is all those things and

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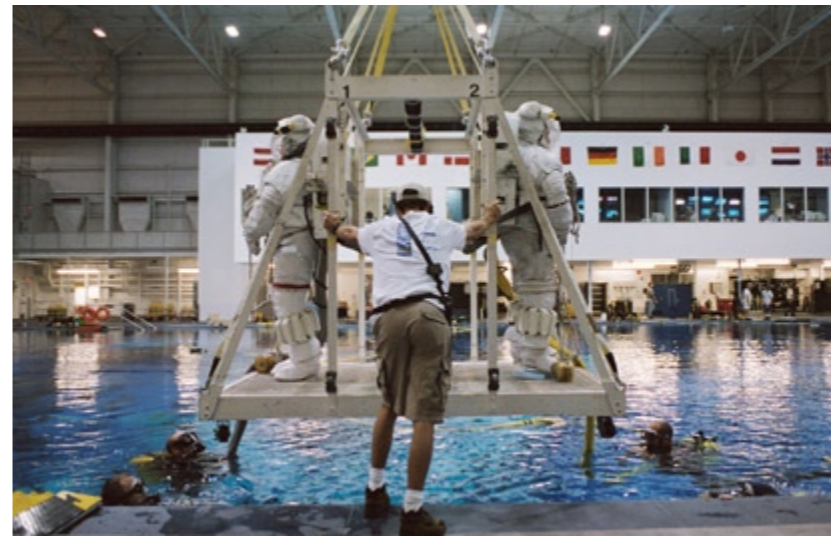
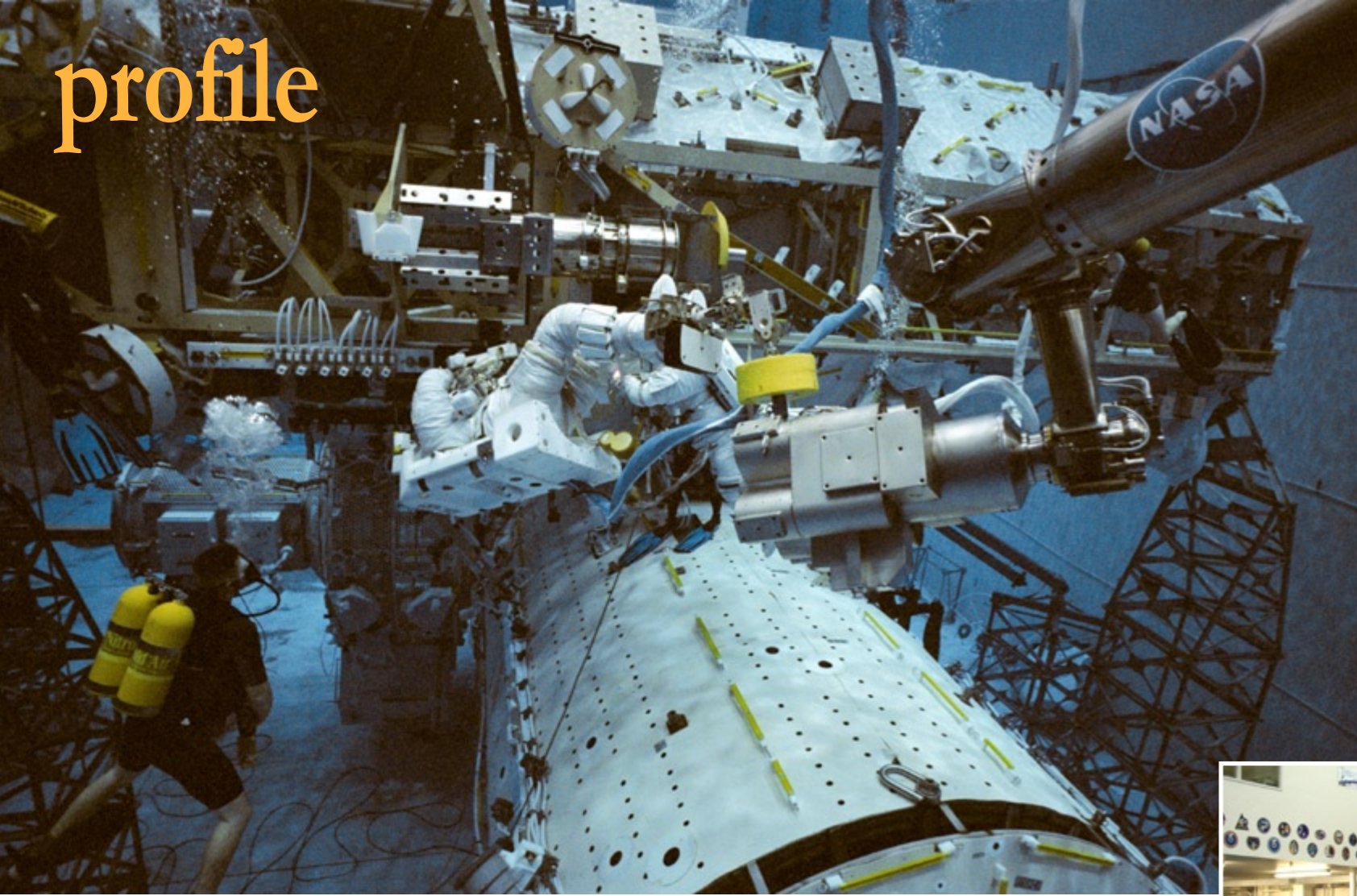
more with every adventure worthy of a journal and memories that last a life time.

What is the best experience diving has given you?

I have to say that it was being introduced to the NAUI family of members around the world, the friendships formed and colleagues met along the way.



Jim Bram



THIS PAGE:  
Scenes from  
NASA's Neutral  
Buoyancy  
Laboratory

## Jim Bram

This message is carried throughout our educational support materials describing our role as stewards of the aquatic environments and ambassadors of good behavior to those fellow users above and below the surface of the water. ■

marine ecosystems?

Climate change is a constant and will continue to change long after humans are no longer present on this planet. However, NAUI's mission includes not only educating the public to



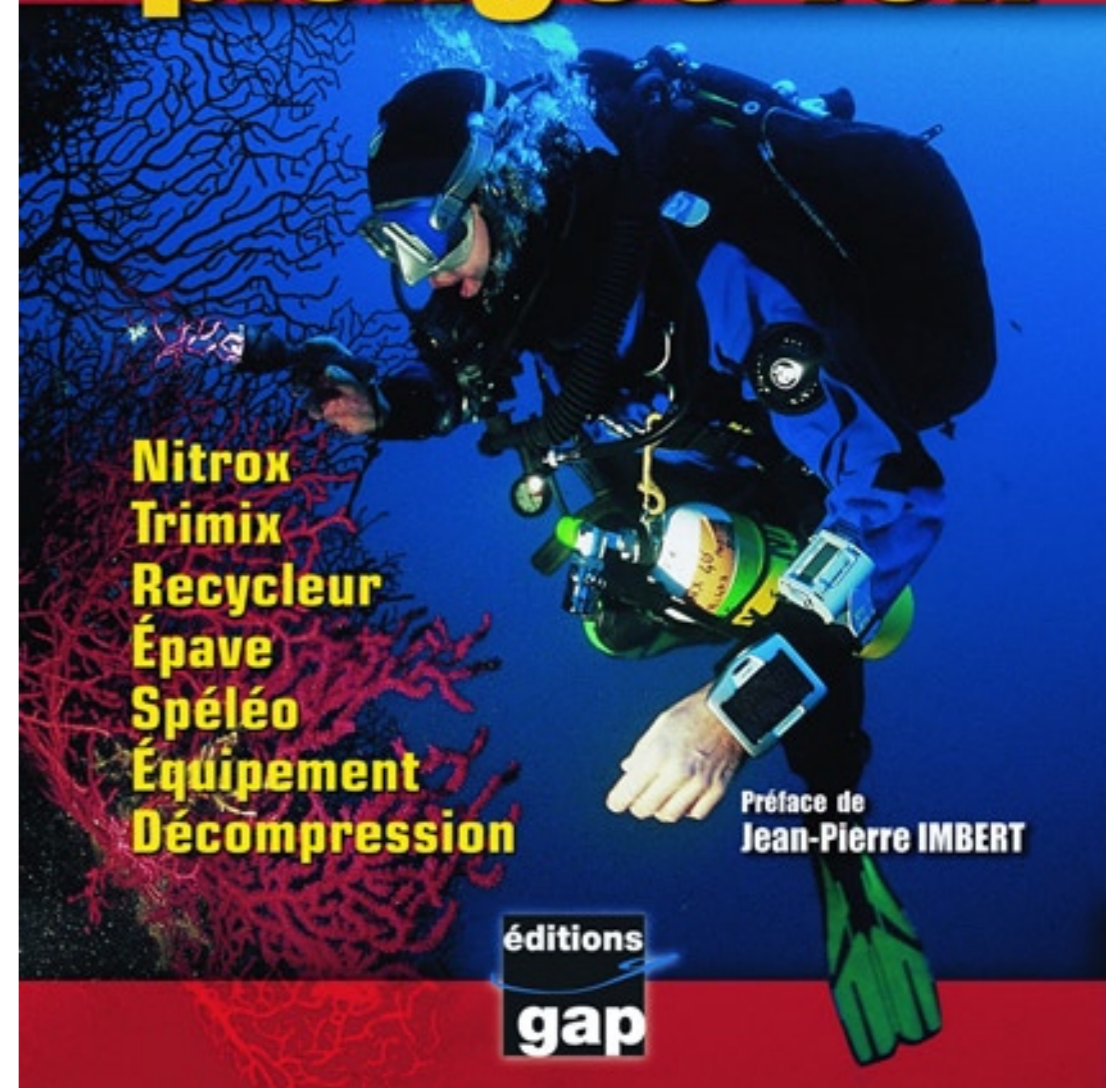
François BRUN • Pascal BERNABÉ • Patrice STRAZZERA

# Le guide de la plongée Tek

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There is much more to come, I'm sure.

What sets NAUI apart from other diver training agencies?

NAUI is the only non-profit organization whose members can directly affect the

future of the organization. We are reminded every day, and I insist that our staff in each of our offices around the world remember that we can only be successful if our members are successful.

What is the next development? What new technologies do you plan to embrace in

terms of marketing/communication, education/learning and diver training/equipment?

There are exciting things forthcoming, but you'll have to wait and be surprised just like everybody else—especially our competitors.

How can divers and training agencies, like NAUI, play a role in tackling the challenges from climate change and the deterioration of

safely dive, but to preserve and protect the world's aquatic environments. To that end, each of us as a resource user can work to leave a dive site in better shape than we found it and certainly no worse off for us having visited.



Astronaut Michael L Gernhardt and NAUI President Jim Bram

