



Midwest Undercurrents: The Fifty-Year Legacy of Scuba Diving in Landlocked Wichita, Kansas –by Tyler Brewer

Note: This historical account is based solely on my memories. If I left something or someone out it is truly unintentional. But this thing called SCUBA in Wichita has some strong roots. Trust me, "I'm not a big deal," others opened doors to a sport that captured something that, other than God and my family, absolutely inspires me. My family and I are also truly grateful for John Vanier who like me, wants this sport to have a lasting place in Kansas. Lastly, my other partner Tim Follis is a friend for life whether he likes it or not.



Introduction: The Living Chain

If you stand on the pool deck at Amber Waves Diving Company in east Wichita and look down into our 18-foot heated training pool, you aren't just looking at water—you are looking at a living conduit of history. Kansas is nearly 1,300 miles away from the nearest ocean coastline, a flat landscape bounded by prairie grass and cornfields. Yet, for over half a century, Wichita has maintained a fiercely passionate, deeply rooted underwater culture.

My own path to becoming the primary owner of Amber Waves didn't begin with a corporate franchise or an online algorithm; it began under the direct mentorship of a local independent legend named **Bernard "Bernie" Keegan**. Before modern retail storefronts standardized training, independent instructors like Bernie were the guardians of the sport. His Navy roots, rigorous dedication to safety, and profound love for the sea were passed directly to me. Today, as I watch new students clear their masks for the first time, I realize that the story of landlocked scuba diving is a narrative of extraordinary individuals who refused to let geography dictate their relationship with the ocean.

The Post-War Pioneers and the Independent Guru (1950s–1960s)

Recreational scuba diving in the Midwest grew from seeds planted by military operations after World War II. When Jacques Cousteau's Aqua-Lung made its way across the Atlantic, it captivated a generation of veterans who had experienced breathing gases and open-water environments while serving.

In Wichita, nobody embodied this spirit more than **Bernie Keegan**. Born in St. Louis, Bernie had enlisted in the U.S. Navy at just 17 years old, going on to fly high-stakes weather reconnaissance missions during the war—valor that earned him the **Distinguished Flying Cross** and the **Air Medal of Honor**. Settlement in civilian life eventually led him to a thirty-year career as a director at St. Joseph Medical Center, but his parallel life was underwater.

Bernie became Wichita's definitive independent instructor. Long before commercial dive centers dominated the market, he operated as a true mentorship-style "guru." He didn't just teach you how to check a pressure gauge; he imbued his students with a rigorous, survival-minded philosophy that only a Navy veteran could command. His classroom was personal, his pool sessions demanding, and his checkout dives legendary. He proved that an exceptional independent instructor could cultivate world-class divers right here in the Midwest, laying the human foundation for everything that followed.

The Attorney Who Cataloged the World: Paul Humann

During that exact same era, another native Wichitan was beginning a journey that would forever alter global marine conservation. **Paul Humann** (1937–2024) grew up in Wichita, graduating from Wichita High School North and Wichita State University and was a close friend of Bernie Keegan. Like Bernie, he discovered diving in the early 1960s. For seven years, Humann practiced law as a highly successful partner in one of the state's largest law firms. But the ocean's call was louder than the courtroom.

Holding PADI instructor certification #2222, Humann made a choice in 1972 that shocked the local legal community: he walked away from his practice, moved to the Caribbean, and bought the *M/V Cayman Diver*—pioneering the concept of live-aboard dive cruisers.

Humann went on to co-found the [Reef Environmental Education Foundation \(REEF\)](#) and authored the definitive *Reef Fish Identification* book series, creating the global industry standard for marine life identification. Multiple marine species are now named in his honor. Humann is a vital pillar for our history: he proved that a landlocked kid from Wichita could not only become an ocean explorer, but could also change how the entire world views and protects coral reef ecosystems.

Foundations and Public Safety (1970s–1980s)

As independent mentors like Bernie Keegan trained the divers, and visionaries like Paul Humann documented the oceans, the physical retail infrastructure of Wichita scuba began to take shape through **Roy F. and Ellen Murphy**.

Operating downtown, their landmark shop—frequently remembered as **Midwest Dive** or **Midwest Scuba Shop**—was the first true commercial hub for local divers. The Murphys were masters of logistics, translating the specialized skill of scuba into an organized community. To bring this vision to life, they relied on core staff like **Ron Shirley**, whose dedication behind the counter and on the floor at Midwest Diving helped anchor the daily operations.

Importantly, Ron wasn't just a face at the shop; he brought an elite level of **technical diving mastery** to the Wichita community at a time when technical diving was still a rare, highly specialized frontier. His deep understanding of mixed gas blending, decompression theory, and advanced underwater problem-solving meant that local divers had access to cutting-edge safety and technical expertise right in the middle of the country.

Together, the Murphys and their team recognized early on that Midwest diving required destination travel. They began escorting massive groups of local divers all over the globe, establishing a robust network of traveling Kansans. Crucially, they tied civilian scuba to public service. They dedicated decades to the **American Red Cross** and were the engine behind **Kansas Water Rescue**.

Working alongside personnel like Ron to manage advanced gear configuration and deep-water logistics, they directly trained local Fire Departments and public safety teams in underwater recovery, ensuring that scuba wasn't just a recreational hobby, but an essential life-saving asset for the state. When the Roy Murphy Estate went to auction in September 2022, the vast collections of vintage gear served as a time capsule for an era that proved a dive shop could be a cornerstone of civic duty.

The Multi-Sport Retail Boom and Adventure Sports (1980s–2000s)

By the 1980s, the economic realities of running a seasonal dive shop in the landlocked Midwest required a new wave of business innovation. Enter **Fred Harvey** (1948–2021). A charismatic visionary who studied physical education at WSU, Harvey understood that Kansans were starved for outdoor adventure. He famously launched the **Shocker Mountain Ski School**, teaching locals to snow-ski on artificial turf right in town.

Harvey's true stroke of genius was combining his winter ski operations with summer scuba diving, a hybrid commercial model that built the foundational footprint of **Adventure Sports**. He proved that pairing these two seasonal sports could sustain a massive, year-round adventure retail powerhouse in the heart of the Midwest.

That torch was eventually passed to **Lynn and Jeff Greenberg**, who ran Adventure Sports on East Central for decades. The Greenberg's formalized modern dive retail for generations of Wichitans. They turned the shop into a welcoming family environment where everyday people could walk in, buy cutting-edge equipment, and get certified. Keeping the tradition of the pioneers alive, they organized legendary group travel—taking landlocked divers to the Florida Keys for lobster hunts, Bimini, and the deep Caribbean—cementing a tight-knit local social club that anchored the city's diving footprint until their eventual retirement and the shop's permanent closure.

Conclusion: Closing the Loop at Amber Waves

Every era of this history operates as a relay race, with the torch passing cleanly from one generation to the next. When the historic commercial storefronts like Adventure Sports and Eric's boutique operation at SCUBA ICT eventually closed their doors, the long legacy of dedicated, full-service local diving operations in Wichita fell directly to us.

When we founded [Amber Waves Diving Company](#) in 2008, we began in Augusta as a small "destination retailer." We leaned heavily into building an authentic, passion-driven dive club atmosphere—the exact same community focus that the Murphys, the Greenberg's, and Fred Harvey championed. To survive and thrive where so many others could not, we evolved, creating the **WICHITACPR TRAINING Center**, a **Travel Company**, and now a **Swim School** to build a diversified, year-round business model. Our first partnership included myself, Dan Wegner, who was a Captain on the Sedgwick County Fire Department, and Dave Freeman, Chief meteorologist with a local news station. Because of other job demands, financial resources, and business philosophies, soon three became one...me.

However, the true scale of this modern vision was finally realized through a powerhouse partnership. Alongside my role as primary owner, I partnered with **Tim Follis** and **John Vanier**, who



joined the venture as critical minority owners of Amber Waves Diving. John Vanier's immense commitment to SCUBA and the local aquatic community went a step further, as he became the majority owner of the state-of-the-art **Aquatics Center**. Since owning a business is not for the faint of heart and requires an immense time commitment, I found a store manager that was completely loyal to our vision and frankly; to me, my son Brian Brewer who became the retail and scheduling manager. My wife is our designated chef since we feed our customers on our certification trips to the lake.

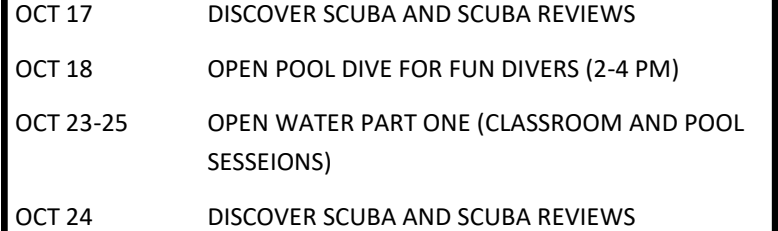


You might say, Amber Waves is truly a family affair. But we recognize and always promote our core belief as being first and foremost, a 'faith-based business,' giving all thanks to the blessings from Christ.

Together, this collective leadership team turned an ambitious dream into a massive, **11,000-square-foot facility** in east Wichita. Complete with its 18-foot-deep indoor heated pool, the center acts as a self-sustaining oasis that trains everyone from young swimmers to professional dive instructors. We proudly carry on the public safety legacy of the Murphys by training the region's premier Public Safety Divers, and we protect the educational standard set by independent leaders like my instructor, Bernie Keegan.

Wichita may be surrounded by an ocean of prairie, but its heart belongs to the deep sea. At Amber Waves, we aren't just running a business; we are keeping a fifty-year chain of midwestern dreamers, explorers, and lifesavers alive.

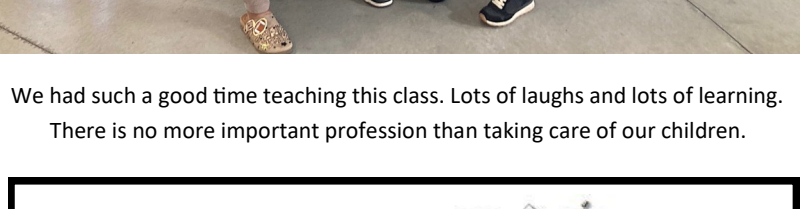




SCUBA SCHOOL

OCT 16-18	OPEN WATER PART ONE (CLASSROOM AND POOL SESSEIONS)
OCT 17	DISCOVER SCUBA AND SCUBA REVIEWS
OCT 18	OPEN POOL DIVE FOR FUN DIVERS (2-4 PM)
OCT 23-25	OPEN WATER PART ONE (CLASSROOM AND POOL SESSEIONS)
OCT 24	DISCOVER SCUBA AND SCUBA REVIEWS
OCT 25	OPEN POOL DIVE FOR FUN DIVERS (2-4 PM)
NOV 6-8	OPEN WATER PART ONE (CLASSROOM AND POOL SESSEIONS)
NOV 7	DISCOVER SCUBA AND SCUBA REVIEWS
NOV 8	OPEN POOL DIVE FOR FUN DIVERS (2-4 PM)
NOV 13-15	OPEN WATER PART ONE (CLASSROOM AND POOL SESSEIONS)
NOV 14	DISCOVER SCUBA AND SCUBA REVIEWS
NOV 15	OPEN POOL DIVE FOR FUN DIVERS (2-4 PM)
NOV 20-22	OPEN WATER PART ONE (CLASSROOM AND POOL SESSEIONS)
NOV 21	DISCOVER SCUBA AND SCUBA REVIEWS
NOV 22	OPEN POOL DIVE FOR FUN DIVERS (2-4 PM)
NOV 27-29	OPEN WATER PART ONE (CLASSROOM AND POOL SESSEIONS)
NOV 28	DISCOVER SCUBA AND SCUBA REVIEWS
NOV 29	OPEN POOL DIVE FOR FUN DIVERS (2-4 PM)

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OV Bungalow DBL DIVER	\$3410	VillaAnton Double DIVER	\$3000
OV Bungalow DBL NON DIVER	\$2680	VillaAnton DBL NON DIVER	\$2250
OV Bungalow Single DIVER	\$4000	Villa Anton Single DIVER	\$3310

VillaAyam DBL DIVER	\$3590
VillaAyam DBL NON DIVER	\$2850
VillaAyam Single DIVER	\$4240

"All In" Alam Batu Packages Include:

- Return Airport Transfers
- 10 nights' accommodation
- Full board meal plan with coffee tea and water included
- Soft drinks, juices, specialty teas, beer, house wine
- Government Taxes
- DIVER: Choice of boat dives, or up to 2 hours spa treatments, or tours each day
- Unlimited nitrox with diving
- Shore diving available on diving days
- NON-DIVER: Choice of spa treatments or tours each day

Package Excludes:

- Airfare (fly in and out of Denpasar, Bali airport code DPS)
- Nusa Penida trips (\$95 per person includes transport, Diving, boxed lunch - pay on site; weather dependent)
- Beverages not mentioned
- Indonesia Visa Fees (Currently \$35 on arrival or pre-pay)
- Night and Black Water Dives – available at a surcharge
- 100 ct ft tank rental
- Personal dive equipment
- Gratuities
- Trip cancellation insurance – **HIGHLY RECOMMENDED!!**

We have had a DBL Occupancy room open up . \$500 each non- refundable deposit holds your spot. We only accept cash or check for our trips

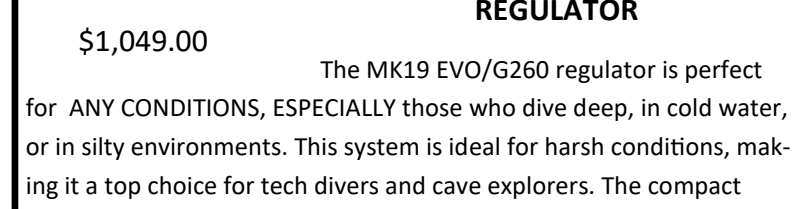


SCUBAPRO MK19 EVO/G260 REGULATOR

\$1,049.00

The MK19 EVO/G260 regulator is perfect for ANY CONDITIONS, ESPECIALLY those who dive deep, in cold water, or in silty environments. This system is ideal for harsh conditions, making it a top choice for tech divers and cave explorers. The compact MK19 EVO is fully sealed, ensuring trouble-free operation in cold or murky waters. The G260 is a highly imitated air-balanced second stage with metal components and a left-right hose attachment option, making it excellent for tech diving setups and a consistent top performer.

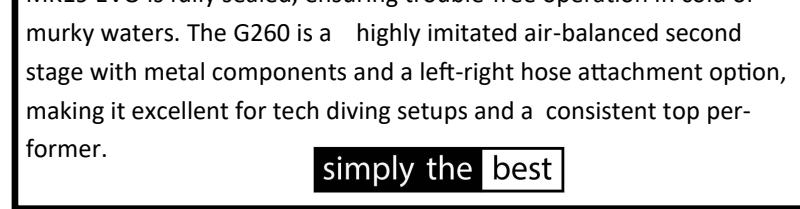
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SCUBAPRO MK11/C370 Regulator

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The new MK11 EVO/R105 is a simple, rugged and reliable air delivery system. The MK11 EVO is a compact balanced diaphragm first stage with a forged brass body fitted with thermal fins and protective plastic bumpers to ward off scratches. The R105 delivers smooth, dependable air flow from its classic downstream valve design. Built to last, the R105 features a durable metal valve housing and an anti-scratch front cover.



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\$799.95

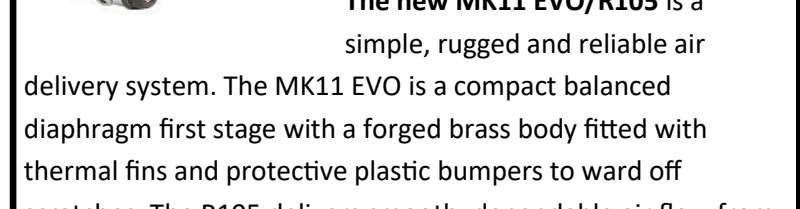
With Transmitter

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SCUBAPRO HYDROS PRO 2 REVIEW

\$1,198.00



SCUBAPRO HYDROS PRO 2 REVIEW

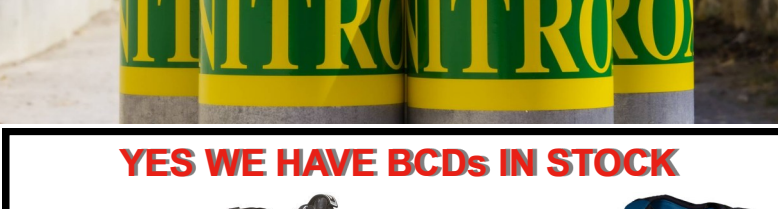
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YES WE HAVE BCDs IN STOCK

SCUBA PRO GLIDE	SCUBA PRO WOMEN'S BELLA	AQUA LUNG WOMEN'S SOUL	AQUA LUNG AXIOM
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IT'S TIME TO OWN YOUR OWN BCD



SHERWOOD SCUBA

The attached review is of the Wisdom 3. The Wisdom 5 shown above can only be sold in brick and mortar stores. Great computer ...Great price.



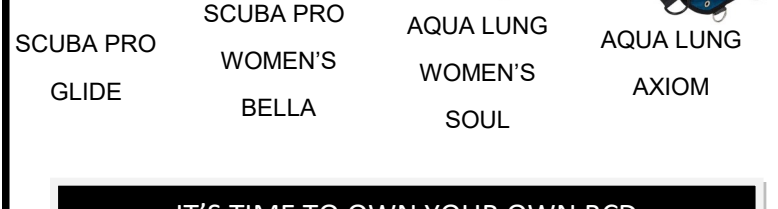
Suunto Nautic Dive Computer w/ Bungee Cord & Tank Pod

Made for Every Dive and Every Diver

From recreational dives to technical missions, Suunto Nautic grows with your passion. It supports single- and multi-gas configurations, sidemount setups, and full decompression planning. Customizable dive views let you choose what matters most at every depth.

Stay Oriented Above and Below the Surface

Suunto Nautic integrates essential navigation and safety tools to keep you oriented wherever you dive. Offline maps and GPS help plan and track your routes, while the built-in digital compass provides precise direction underwater. Tide, weather, and sunrise/sunset data support safe surface intervals, and the integrated flashlight brings visibility and convenience when light is scarce. Nautic keeps you aware and in control, both underwater and on the surface.



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AMBER WAVES DIVING REPAIR CENTER

Properly functioning gear is crucial. Your safety depends on it. That's why we are the best technicians in the business to service your gear.

What to expect

We have certified technicians that always follow manufacturer guidelines. We're always on the lookout for wear and corrosion, immediately swapping out anything worn or damaged. We want your next dive to be your best dive!