

## ACHIEVEMENT

## Teen dives into scuba certification

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Contributing Writer

VANDALIA — Vandalia resident Zach Miller might prefer to spend his free time quietly exploring the murky depths of Ohio's quarries, but the 18-year-old has captured the spotlight in the scuba diving world.

This summer, Miller became the first person in the world to progress from PADI Seal to PADI Divemaster certification.

PADI, or the Professional Association of Diving Instructors, is the largest recreational SCUBA training organization in the world, according to Lynn Wickline, owner of Aquatic Realm Scuba Center in Centerville and one of Miller's instructors.

The program includes a cascade of certifications that become more complicated the more advanced the diver becomes.

At 13, Miller enrolled in the PADI Seal program, open to kids aged 8 to 14, and quickly advanced.

By age 15, Miller became a certified Master Scuba Diver.

The highest nonprofessional certification in PADI, the Master Scuba Diver certification requires more than 50 dives in open water.

"At the beginning it was more of a challenge and a cool thing to do because not many people around here do it. Also, it's cool to go underwater," Miller said.

When he turned 18 in February, he began pursuing the Divemaster certification, a professional-level certification.

The program takes nine months to two years to complete, and some of the requirements count toward college credit.

"You spend months and months learning physiology, doing academics, taking exams," Wickline said.

Zach Miller, 18, recently earned a professional-level certification for scuba diving. He has been scuba diving since he was 12 years old. Contributed photo

"It's a college course."

Miller achieved his Dive-master certification in about six months, right before he left for his freshman year at the University of St. Francis in Fort Wayne, Ind.

As he advanced through adult-level certifications, Miller played soccer and held down jobs to pay for his scuba training.

At Chaminade-Julienne, Miller qualified for a football scholarship.

Wickline noted that Miller's ability to achieve Divemaster certification while balancing his other interests is a major accomplishment.

"It's not a program everyone is successful at. It's not a given that you will become a professional," she said.

In less than six years, Miller has logged 40 hours in 72 open water dives.

Although he has explored

the coasts off Florida, Mexico and Belize, Miller prefers the shadowy waters of the Buckeye state.

"You don't get the 200-foot visibility. It's more of a challenge in this water to navigate," he said.

Wickline said Miller is one of the easiest students she has ever had.

"It is cool for me to realize he is no longer a student for me; he is now my dive partner."