

Myth: You can't go scuba diving in Ohio

Aquatic Realm in Centerville goes deep.

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By Debbie Juniewicz - Contributing Writer

Lynn Wickline was sure she wouldn't like scuba diving.

"I wasn't a strong water person, I was a dog paddler," Wickline said, smiling. "I thought it was just too water intensive for me."

That was then.

Wickline is now a PADI (Professional Association of Diving Instructors) course director, one of only 700 designated as such worldwide. She owns the Aquatic Realm Scuba Center in Centerville and now shares her love of the sport with aspiring divers of all ages.

The roundabout way she got into the sport has shaped her approach as an instructor.

"I think how you are introduced has a lot to do with whether someone becomes a lifelong diver," Wickline said. "I couldn't drag my husband and kids out of the water but I was quite content on the beach. My husband would always have to find someone to dive with so, finally, I told him 'I can't say I don't like something if I've never tried it so, let's put this to rest.'"

Wickline took the plunge – literally – one afternoon in the Cayman Islands. It wasn't a great experience and she didn't have a great instructor but there was enough of a spark that she thought maybe – just maybe – she would like it. And she was right.

Wickline isn't alone as PADI certified 945,107 divers last year alone and has certified more than 21 million divers since the late 1960s.

But despite its popularity, there are several misconceptions about the sport that you can learn in the comfort of the Aquatic Realm's 90-degree training tank.

Wickline dispels some of the common misconceptions about scuba diving.

- You can't go scuba diving in Ohio: "It just blows people's minds that there is scuba diving so close by. And the beauty about Ohioans is they don't mind driving. We have the Great Lakes, lots of super rivers and five or six stone quarries within a few hours drive, providing lots of unique diving experiences."
- You have to be an Olympic caliber swimmer to scuba dive: "Do you have to like the water — yes. Do you have to be comfortable in the water — yes. And you have to have some swimming skills, but by no means do you have to be a competitive swimmer."
- Scuba diving will make you feel claustrophobic: "This is a huge misconception. In reality, the opposite is actually true. If anything, because you are weightless, you feel so free."
- You're too old or too young to go scuba diving: "We start training kids as young as 8, they can become certified when they are 10. There are some supervision and depth restrictions but they are lifted once a certified diver is 15 or older."

We have no adult age restrictions; it's purely dictated by health and stamina. With the exception of blindness, there aren't many physical challenges that can prevent you from diving. We have had divers here who are in wheelchairs or are hearing impaired. All of our instructors are trained in adaptive teaching.

We've had people certified for the first time when they were well into their 70s. This is one of the easiest multi-generational activities I can think of because, once we're underwater, we're all equal.

There are certain medical conditions that could require medical permission or preclude participation so we advise everyone to print the medical form from our website and talk to their doctor."

- Scuba diving is incredibly dangerous: "It gets a really bad rap as a high-adventure type of activity when, in reality, it's very safe because you have to be trained to do it. The truth is, we are fairly lazy athletes, we don't do much more than breathe."
- It takes a long time to get certified: "There is an academic requirement, which can all be done online. There is confined water training, which is where you start building your skills, and there is open water training, which consists of four dives in an open body of water."

You could complete the academic portion in 2-4 days online and then do the rest in two weekends of diving. It's a lot less time than people think."

And while Wickline loves the sport, she might just enjoy introducing it to others even more.

"We hear two things quite a lot, either 'I've always wanted to try this' or 'this is on my bucket list,'" she said. "Either way, we get to make people's dreams come true."

Ready to take the dive?

Discover Scuba Diving.

Where: Aquatic Realm Scuba Center, 1807 South Metro Parkway, Centerville

Information: www.aquaticrealmscuba.com

Scuba in the region

You don't have to head to the tropics to experience scuba diving; these quarries are all found within a one-to-three-hour drive.

- Blue Springs Park (Waldron, Ind.): Average depth 40-50 feet; average visibility: 15-30 feet.
- Circleville Twin Quarries (Circleville, Ohio): Average depth: 20-25 feet; average visibility: 15-25 feet.



The Clark Family includes three generations of divers. They finished a Scuba refresher class at Aquatic Realm Scuba. CONTRIBUTED

- Gilboa Stone Quarry (near Findlay, Ohio): Average depth: 35-130 feet; average visibility: 20-40 feet.
- Hidden Paradise (Saint Paul, Ind.): Average depth: 20-25 feet; average visibility 15-30 feet.
- Portage Quarry (near Bowling Green, Ohio): Average depth: 30-50 feet; average visibility: 25-40 feet.
- White Rock Park (Saint Paul, Ind.): Average depth: 25-45 feet, average visibility: 15-30 feet.
- White Stone Quarry (near Bowling Green, Ohio): Average depth: 25-45 feet; average visibility: 40-50 feet.