

# Scuba Diving, Swimming & Sailing



**Now Taught in the  
Marine Vocational Program**



Written by Carol M. Bareuther, RD



One of the Virgin Islands' greatest assets is its surrounding seas. Millions of visitors come each year to swim, scuba dive, and sail.

Now, through the Marine Vocational Program (MVP), a program run under the V.I. Council of the Boy Scouts of America, young islanders have the opportunity to experience these water sports and to earn certifications that will enable them to turn this seaworthy asset into a future career.

Capt. Jimmy Loveland, director of the USVI Open/Atlantic Blue Marlin Tournament (ABMT), nicknamed the 'Boy Scout' tournament for the event's chief beneficiary, launched the MVP back in December 2007.

"The tournament committee's desire to create additional learning programs that would provide career opportunities in the Virgin Islands' marine industry grew out of the ABMT's long-time commitment to help fund the youth programs offered by the Boy Scouts," says Loveland. "Because of our strong ties to this industry, the committee decided it would be best to operate the MVP under the Boy Scouts."

Scuba diving instruction was the first program to be put into place. It is run out of the St. Thomas Diving Club, owned by Andre Webber, and located at the Bolongo Bay Beach Resort.

"We told the scouts and their parents in the first meeting that if the kids would agree to attend all classes, arrive on time, and complete the homework, in other words, act responsibly, that we would assure that they would succeed," says Webber.

And succeed the scouts did. Thirty-five 13- to 24-year-old Boy Scouts and Venture Scouts to date have completed the six-week PADI Open Water Diver certification course. Two-thirds of these scouts have gone on to take the PADI

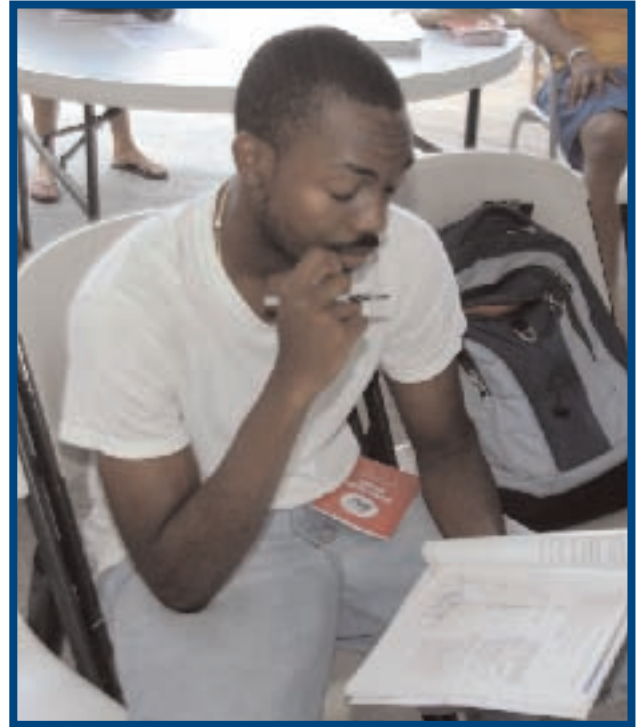
Advanced Open Water Diver course, one-third have become Rescue Divers, and six are now working on their Divemaster certification. One scout who completed his Rescue Diver training, Ezra Carty, was hired last summer to work as a diver at the Coral World Ocean Park (See Sidebar).

In January of 2011, a program to teach Cub Scouts how to swim was created in partnership with the St. Thomas Swimming Association.

Sailing is the most recent "spoke in the wheel", which is what Loveland calls each water sport that makes-up the MVP. The sailing program is taught by Paul Stoeken, an Olympic windsurfer, owner of Island Sol Water Sports at the Ritz-Carlton, St. Thomas, and a U.S. Sailing Association instructor/trainer.

"We started the Scouts off with the U.S. Sailing Association's Level 1 Small Boat Certification Course aboard Hobie Waves," says Stoeken. "I was originally going to teach them in an IC-24, but they liked the Waves best because these boats are faster, wetter, and they could sail them by themselves."

The 10-hour course spanned four days and taught the five Scouts who participated wind theory, rigging, de-rig-



**Studying for Sailing Certificate**



**Heading out for a scuba dive**

ging, launching, self-rescue, capsizing recovery, basic seamanship, knot-tying, points of sail, steering, sail-trim, tacking, jibing, and pretty much everything they need to be able to safely sail a small boat on their own. "I really liked the experience of being able to control your



***MVP group sail and snorkel outing to Christmas Cove aboard 76' Ocean Racing Catamaran "Spirit"***

own boat," says Scout Tyriq Isles. "I always wanted to learn to sail and I certainly learned a lot. We had all different types of wind to practice tacks, jibes, and all sorts of different skills. Sailing is something I'd like to continue."

Stoeken says, "From here, Scouts that show a continued interest and the skills required will be able to enroll in our U.S. Sailing Level 1 Small Boat Instructor Course which will open up opportunities [for them] to work as sailing instructors at the many watersports centers in the Virgin Islands. From there, we will have them log hours on the water to work toward getting their USCG Captains License, which would open up even more opportunities for employment in the marine industry."

Funding for the MVP has come from the profits of off-shore sport fishing tournaments and private donations. Future plans call for the hiring of a Director who will write grants, develop curriculum, and establish an endowment fund to sustain the program long term.

**Donation checks can be made out to  
VI Council, Boy Scouts of America.**

**Please mail to:**

**MVP, 6616 Estate Nadir, St. Thomas, VI 00802**

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**Support ABMT's Marine  
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Keeping kids on the  
water and off the streets.**





# MVP STUDENT EZRA CARTY

## GOING PLACES IN LIFE!



Some may say that high school senior, Boy Scout, and Marine Vocational Program (MVP) student Ezra

Carty has saltwater flowing through his veins. After all, his maternal grandfather hailed from the British Virgin Islands and sailed down to Trinidad and across to Puerto Rico regularly on cargo runs in the 1940s and '50s. His paternal grandfather's roots were planted on Anguilla, an island known for its proficient ship captains. What's more, his father is a certified scuba diver and his older brother is a third year cadet at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy. So, it makes perfect sense that this senior at All Saints Cathedral School spent his summer employed by Coral World Ocean Park and put the Rescue Diver Certification he earned through the MVP to very good use.

"My parents enrolled my brother and I in swimming lessons down at Magens Bay when I was four or five years old," says Carty. "I started Cub Scouts shortly after that. We'd take beach trips in Cub Scouts and I'd enjoyed swimming."

Carty transitioned from Cub Scout to Boy Scout and entered the MVP.

"I remember we first went out sailing

with an instructor from the St. Thomas Yacht Club," Carty recalls. "There were two of us in the 420s and we learned how to tack and jibe and navigate through the channels."

The MVP students then progressed to sailing on bigger boats such as the IC24s. After each sailing session, instructors taught the students the theory and reasoning behind what they did on the water. That training allowed them to then take out small boats such as Sunfish for a sail.

"I like being out on the water," says Carty. "It's a calm, natural environment where you can be alone with your thoughts. It's very relaxing."

A Boy Scout trip with VI Eco Tours, a company that leads two-and-a-half-hour kayak-snorkel trips through St. Thomas' protected Mangrove Lagoon, first opened Carty's eyes to the undersea world.

"We snorkeled for part of that trip and I loved to see the colors, the coral, and the fish," he says. "I wished I could stay down and explore around much more."

The opportunity to learn scuba diving presented itself in the MVP program.

"One day our Scout Master asked who wanted to learn to scuba dive," tells Carty. "One of the prerequisites was that you had to know how to swim.

Four or five of us did and we all went to start our Open Water Certification."

The MVP's scuba diving component is taught at the St. Thomas Diving Club, a PADI 5-Star Instructor Development Center, located at the Bolongo Bay Reach Resort.

"We started out in the Bolongo pool learning to use the equipment and understand the basic concepts," says Carty.

From there, the MVP scuba students headed out between Bolongo and Buck Island for their open ocean training. The

### Ezra at Coral World On The Job





classes were held every Saturday from 9 a.m. until 3 p.m. for a six week period. There were written and hands-on tests. Carty enjoyed the course so much that he signed up for the Advanced Open Water Certification.

"We took a night dive as part of that course and it was amazing to see all the nocturnal sea life,"

says Carty. "When you moved your hand through the water you could see all phosphoresce."

Carty then moved on to the Rescue Diver Certification, a course where he also earned his American Red Cross Certified First Responder Certificate.

Last December, over the Christmas holidays, Carty and his family visited Coral World Ocean Park on St. Thomas. He inquired about working at the well-known attraction, but only weekday opportunities when school was in session were available. Carty applied for a summer position and got the job. On his first day he was literally thrown in with the sharks!

"I went with another diver and we got in the shark tank out at the Undersea Observatory Tower," he recalls. "Our job was to clean the algae off the windows so visitors could see the fish and sea life."

Worth noting is that the other divers Carty works with are all age 20 or older.

One of Carty's other jobs is to feed the fish in the park's Caribbean Reef Encounter, a circular 80,000 gallon coral reef aquarium. Carty is the star of the twice-daily show that takes place at 9:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. He dons his scuba gear, descends into the tank, and feeds the fish, moving from window to window all around the aquarium so that visitors can watch the fish feeding frenzy.

Carty's work in the marine industry didn't stop when the summer finished and he returned for his senior year at All Saints School. Instead, he followed up on a job opening and was hired part-time at the St. Thomas location of Budget Marine, a marine chandlery with a dozen locations throughout the Caribbean.

What's next for Carty? The year 2012 will mark his graduation from high school, the attainment of the rank of Eagle Scout, and the celebration of his 18th birthday, a milestone that offers the opportunity for Carty to work on his Dive Master Certification. His goal is college and a degree in physical therapy. However, Carty says that working in the marine industry has provided him with invaluable experience and is something he knows he can always return to in the future. 