

# THE CAYMAN BOTTOM TIMES

## Dive News from the Cayman Islands

In Grand Cayman: Divetech, Ocean Frontiers, Red Sail Sports, Sunset House  
In Little Cayman: Southern Cross Club

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## Every Day is Earth Day for Cayman Dive Operators

*Industry leaders team up to raise awareness and help protect the marine environment*

*Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands* - "We picked up junk, marine debris, flip flops, plastic containers, metal and more," said Nancy Easterbrook of the reef and beach cleanup Divetech sponsored for Earth Day on Sunday, April 21. Free tanks and weights were offered to all divers willing to join the estimated one billion people world-wide who take action to protect the planet each year on this day.

"I choose to get involved because it matters," said Easterbrook who has hosted cleanups for the past 14 years. "Awareness and education about the marine environment, and engaging the public and customers in protecting it, is vital to saving it."

On Little Cayman more than 100 bags filled with trash were collected from beaches on Saturday, April 20 during the 3rd annual island-wide beach cleanup and lecture show sponsored by the Southern Cross Club. Participants paid special attention to sea turtle nesting beaches since breeding season is about to start. "Earth Day is an excellent way to involve the community in conservation," says Manager Neil van Niekerk. "We include both our guests and our staff in as many initiatives as possible."

At Sunset House in Grand Cayman, dive staff gathered several bins of trash from nearby dive sites and the shoreline. "We are also careful not to disrupt existing underwater homes," said General Manager Keith Sahm, "a beer bottle or tire left submerged for long can become home for a small octopus or an important breeding area."

Beautiful coral, plunging walls, abundant marine life and crystal water are reasons why Cayman diving is legendary. Grand Cayman, Cayman Brac and Little Cayman are the tops of underwater limestone mountains, so they have incredible walls all around and visibility generally ranges from 100 – 200 feet. Since the start of recreational diving here some 60 years ago, a strong partnership between dive operators and the government has developed to protect the reefs, and a National Marine Parks System was established in 1986. With safety and conservation in mind, the Cayman dive market has grown with the times.

"I think Earth Day is a good reminder for everybody to pay attention and realize that everything they do has an impact every day," says Steve Broadbelt of Ocean Frontiers on Grand Cayman's East End. "If you touch a coral it dies, and it will take years and years for that coral to regrow."

Divetech, Ocean Frontiers, Red Sail Sports, Sunset House in Grand Cayman, and the Southern Cross Club in Little Cayman, the vanguard of Cayman's dive industry, have teamed up to use their experience and well-earned reputations, to promote Cayman's superb diving and raise awareness of the need to protect it, not just on Earth Day, but every day.

Red Sail Sports Operations Manager Rod McDowall says guests who take a Discover Diving Resort Course at any of their four dive shops learn the basics of scuba, but also the ethics of being a responsible diver. "We make sure our instructors impress on their students how beautiful, but fragile corals are, and how they should look and enjoy, but not touch," he adds.

These dive operators understand that staff is on the conservation front line, so education starts at home. Ocean Frontiers asks staffers to lead by example and practice eco-friendly procedures every day. Guests are asked to follow a responsible diver code meant to reduce impact on reefs; check buoyancy, make sure equipment is properly clipped, fin carefully and avoid contact with coral.

"For years we assumed that all divers and people in the industry love and care for the environment - which is true, but there wasn't a consistent and clear message from our company," said Broadbelt. "I want everybody on the same page, and I want our staff to know how important the environment is to our business."

Environmental protection *is* good for the dive business. These operators all support pending legislation to update Cayman's Conservation Law to protect certain species and the Marine Parks Law to expand the parks. They also spearhead the fight to eradicate invasive lionfish that threaten Cayman reefs, so they are all participating in a Lionfish Culling Tournament April 26th and 27<sup>th</sup>.

Pollution remains a top threat for the ocean so local cleanups are vital. Steve Broadbelt says picking up trash on the beach at Ocean Frontiers is a regular chore. "I wonder where it all comes from... a cruise ship, another shore? Who is supposed to clean it up?" He asks.

Keith Sahm has an answer. "The goal is to educate people and keep them from littering in the first place."

#### **About Us**

*The Cayman Bottom Times* is news collaboration by five leading dive operators to promote the superb diving of the Cayman Islands, and keep the diving public informed of developments and events. Offering diverse and wide-ranging dive programs on both Grand Cayman and Little Cayman, the members of this group represent more than 100 years of solid experience in a destination that is recognized as the birthplace of recreational diving; Divetech ([www.divetech.com](http://www.divetech.com)), Ocean Frontiers ([www.oceanfrontiers.com](http://www.oceanfrontiers.com)), Red Sail Sports Grand Cayman ([www.redsailcayman.com](http://www.redsailcayman.com)), Sunset House ([www.sunsethouse.com](http://www.sunsethouse.com)) and the Southern Cross Club ([www.southerncrossclub.com](http://www.southerncrossclub.com)) are all members of the Cayman Islands Tourism Association (CITA).

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