



# BENEATH THE SEA HONORS

## Tom McElwee

### AS THEIR 2020

# NORTHEAST DIVING PIONEER

In 1942 Tom McElwee was 15, Tom's uncle, who was in the navy, helped Tom construct a crude 'diving helmet' from a large tin bucket so he could get underwater. In 1944 Tom joined the navy. He was assigned to the Light Carrier USS Independence CVL-22. He was still on the Indy in 1946 when a call went out for volunteers to special duty at the Bikini Atoll, Tom volunteered for Operation Crossroads and was witness to the atomic bomb tests,

In 1965, Tom completed a basic scuba course at a local Philadelphia area YMCA. He started diving the local quarries, then the shipwrecks off New Jersey. In the late '60's Tom joined several local dive clubs and eventually became president and Dive Master for the C-Y and Main Line clubs.

Tom joined the Eastern Divers Association (EDA), one of the earliest dive groups dedicated to exploration diving local shipwrecks and dove with them through the rest of EDAs existence. In 1967, Tom became a YMCA instructor and over the next 30 plus years certified several thousand divers. Tom went on to become the YMCA's Regional Field Rep, for the Mid-Atlantic region, covering PA, NJ, DE, MD, Puerto Rico, and the Washington DC areas. Then in 1968 Tom cross-certified as a PADI instructor (instructor #707).

A diving dynamo, Tom provided the instruction and the enthusiasm for many hundreds of divers to dive the fine shipwrecks of the Northeast. In 1976 Tom bought the derelict 72-foot trawler, the "Quest", had it dismantled and hauled it to a Richland quarry in Myerstown, PA. Tom's mission was to increase the number of classes and divers through the additional attraction of a sunken shipwreck in the quarry. In their quest for experience, Tom's efforts introduced thousands of divers to their first exposure to "wreck diving."

In the Northeast dive community Tom McElwee became a noted lecturer making presentations on wreck diving to business organizations, dive clubs, scout troops, and schools. He also created and operated a Philadelphia area diving search and rescue team. Tom's group supported both local and state law enforcement agencies in their search for crime evidence and recovery missions. At the same time, Tom taught several law enforcement agency diving members the basics of his underwater crime scene preservation and recovery techniques.



Temple University's scuba program has had Tom as a guest lecturer in many of their Open Water scuba classes. Recently a professor at the school said: "Tom brings a 1st hand perspective of diving to the courses that we've not seen in any other program. We can talk about diving history, but Tom IS diving history. Our students love his lectures."

Today this 92-year-old SCUBA Instructor Emeritus is retired. But not quite retired for Tom remains active in the diving community. at Temple University, his presence has a positive impact on new diving students, as Tom assists Open Water classes, gives lectures in diving history, and assists poolside and on checkout dives. Tom is living proof that diving truly is a life-long activity.

