



# PSDiver Monthly

## REPRINT

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Authorized Reprint – PSDiver Monthly is a free Internet magazine dedicated to Water Rescue and Recovery Teams. Visit us at <http://www.PSDiver.com/>

## Ventura County Sheriff's Mini-Mother Dominique Evans-Bye

A loved one is lost. A violent crime has been committed, the weapon tossed in the lake. Someone has gone down in the water and time is running out.



Sheriff's Department in Southern California. The department had called on Charlie to respond for

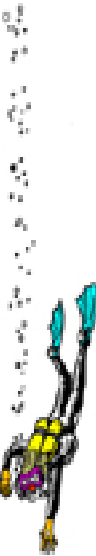
These are just some of the reasons for calling on the Ventura County Sheriff's Search and Rescue Dive Team. Local Ventura County resident, Charlie Curtis, founded the Dive Team in 1967, at the request of the Ventura County

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water rescue emergencies, in-water evidence and body recoveries so many times that officials decided it was in the community's best interest to have the veteran diver build and train a volunteer Dive, Search and Recovery team. Divers recruited to the team have always been selected on the basis of outstanding watermanship skills and a high level of dedication and commitment to the team. Over the years, the team developed specialized equipment to ensure searches went as efficiently and as effectively as possible. If one item could define the team, it would be the "mini-mother."

In a past conversation, Charlie laughingly describes the metamorphosis of a particular piece of rescue equipment the team so fondly refers to as ***Mother***. ***Mother*** was a ***makeshift float*** used in recoveries. Multiple divers could work off a line performing a circular ***search pattern*** effectively using ***Mother***. "In the early days the thing was so heavy it took four people to load it onto the ***trailer*** and four people to unload," Charlie said, pointing out how time consuming that process was. When asked how the

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float got its name, he explained, "It was such a... er... challenge to load and unload," he said with a grin. "Back then **Mother** was made of two 2 by 4s that were mounted crosswise. It was 6 feet long and had so much hardware on it that it needed to be surrounded by an inner tube from a wheel of a C-47 aircraft to stay afloat. The structure was held secure in the water by a 100-pound weight underneath, which was made out of a brake drum filled with lead. Throughout the years, Charlie and other dive team members continued to come up with innovative changes to make "Mother" easier and more efficient to work with. Mother never really became "easy" to work with, so finally, sometime in the 1970s,



**Mother** was officially retired. In her place, the team developed smaller, individual floatation systems for single-diver circular search patterns. This new system had many advantages over **Mother**. The floatation consisted of a 5- to 7-gallon bucket, and the anchor was a 25-pound break drum. The new system was christened the Mini-Mother. One diver could

now easily deploy and maneuver their personal **Mini-Mother** into position as directed from shore.



A single diver working a line no longer needed to worry about misunderstandings in communication between multiple people underwater. In zero or low visibility water conditions, divers working closely on a line together continually bump and kick each other. Something as simple as following a predetermined course direction can be a challenge with multiple divers under harsh conditions. The team discovered there are situations in which the buddy system can be more a hindrance than help. Over the years, the **Mini-Mother** system has proven to be very effective for the team and is still used today.

Team members constantly challenge themselves and each other to improve upon the design of equipment or procedures used for underwater searches. As a volunteer organization, members come from a wide variety of fields, and as a result, they bring a diverse knowledge base to the team. VC SAR divers pool



Waves were running a steady 2 to 3 feet high with the occasional 4 to 5 foot set coming in. It was divable if timed right. The probies were up for the challenge. The team captain was not able to attend the training because of a problem that had just come up at work. The training officer was thinking “\*%#\$!!@\* Tim, you set me up to send guys into high surf carrying a board big enough to take most of them out and a razor sharp saw, and you don’t show up! This could get ugly.”

their strengths, cover for each other’s weaknesses and work as a team in the truest sense.

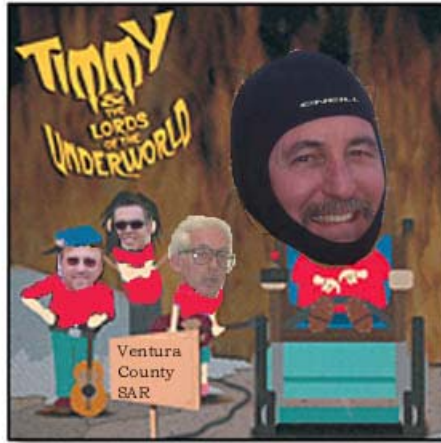
Members are required to attend monthly training sessions, which covers core skills and often explores new skills or technology that could improve the safety or performance of the team. Occasionally introducing new or different concepts and/or “toys” for evaluation keeps the interest level of the team members up increases participation and helps prevent burnout.



Pushing thoughts such as OSHA, gross negligence and liability aside, the entire team was staged throughout the surf zone, topside on the boat and underwater at the dive site as safety precautions. The probies got through the surf without difficulty, dealt with surge and extremely limited visibility to successfully meet all the training objectives. They enjoyed the challenge, they enjoyed the exercise and they still talk about the night dive training to this day. A bit of old school mentality mixed in with current public safety divers (PSDs) practices and procedures work well for the team and define the character unique to this dive team.

When recruiting new divers for the team, each candidate is required to attend the training academy that tests applicant's skills in the water and his or her ability to think on their fins under pressure. Team building exercises are an important aspect of integrating new members into the team. During the last academy, dive team captain Tim Coates, decided to use an innovative team building exercise for the beach evening dive. The seven recruits who had passed all initial evaluations were given one 2- by 8- foot wooden board, along with a saw, hammer, nails, string and instructions to enter the water, swim out to a location where the depth was 15 to 20 feet. After descending to the bottom, cut the board into equal parts and fasten the string to each piece of board similar to the way string is used to hang a picture on a wall. Each diver had to carve their initials into their finished board. The divers were given time to make a plan on how the materials would be taken out to the dive site, and to assign tasks to each participant. The training committee had planned the activity well. Multiple safety precautions were set in place. Mother Nature, however, was not going to cooperate with the plan. Surf that night had kicked up a bit.

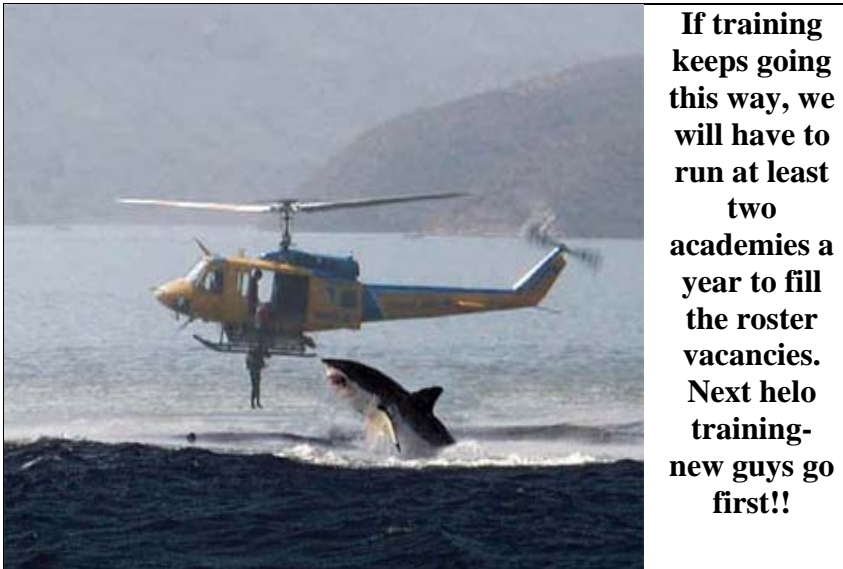
Team camaraderie has made the dive team a very cohesive unit. There are no ego issues to contend with. The most enjoyable part of training is the comic relief it offers. Training is serious, but so is the



fun. The dive team's website is maintained in a professional manner, as it represents the Ventura County Sheriff's Department. There is, however, a section in the password protected "member's only" page titled "The Lighter Side of SAR." In this frequently updated area, accessible only to those who know the secret handshake, aspects of the team's personality are revealed. For example, anyone familiar with "South Park" can see the uncanny correlation between "Timmy" and his band, Lords of the Underworld" and the VC SAR Dive Team led by Tim Coates.

PSDs are often asked, "Why do you do it?" The answer lies not with the patches, but in the deep sense of satisfaction of giving something back to the community by using unique skills and talents that are honed sharp by constant training. It is in the sense of adventure realized by learning and practicing skills that are usually outside the realm of recreational diving. It's the adrenaline rush that comes from jumping out of a hovering helicopter into the water, rappelling in full scuba down rocky cliffs to dive in a waterfall- fed pond, or successfully doing a search dive off a beach with waves you've thought surely, no one ever would or could get through. PSD diving is pushing and challenging yourself each time to be better than before, all the while being backed-up and supported by your team along the way.

When the worst happens, and a body or crime scene evidence has to be recovered, the best part of ourselves rise up to perform the job and help give closure to those who count on us to do so.



**If training keeps going this way, we will have to run at least two academies a year to fill the roster vacancies. Next helo training- new guys go first!!**

To learn more about the Ventura County Sheriff's Dive Team, please visit: <http://vcsardive.org>

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