

# The Business

## of *Pleasure*

Scuba diving has taken Randy Kraft from YMCA instructor to Caribbean resort consultant. But the Scuba One owner still calls North Dakota home



**Randy Kraft's** water sports consulting business takes him to Jamaica on a regular basis. He now is looking for a way to make the trips profitable.

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*Bismarck Tribune*

**M**ost small business owners would probably envy the growing pains being experienced by Randy Kraft of Scuba One.

Kraft, who started the diving instruction and equipment sales business in 1982, moved it this month to a larger store at 2010 46th Ave. in Mandan. "I really needed this," he said of his shop's garage. With the garage, he has 950 square feet of space. It may be enough to keep Kraft anchored in North Dakota despite growing business opportunities in the Caribbean.

Since 1992, the master scuba instructor has been visiting a half-dozen Jamaican resorts each year to evaluate their water sports programs. Kraft writes annual reports for each resort, but one owner wants more.

"I met with him in April and he said, 'This annual report thing isn't working out. You should be down here at least once every six months,'" Kraft said. He is negotiating with the resort company to make going to Jamaica more often financially worthwhile.

"Everything's paid for," Kraft said. "But it doesn't pay the rent. That's the biggest problem right now."

And he doesn't want to move to Jamaica, even if he could get a work permit from the island country's government. "This is my home, and when you live down there you have to deal with a whole lot of problems that you don't have to deal with when you show up for a week as a tourist," Kraft said.

Kraft, 37, started scuba diving while he was a student at Moorhead State University. He graduated in 1982 from a 10-week diving school in San Diego, started teaching classes at the Bismarck YMCA and then started his business.

"In '84, I was kind of bored ... so I called the school (in San Diego) and I said, 'Can I go work some place?'" Kraft said. The school connected him with a resort owner in Jamaica.

"I worked for Watersports Enterprises," Kraft said. "It was the largest water sports company in Jamaica."

After getting a work permit, he helped for five years with scuba diving, yacht cruises, deep sea fishing and other activities at four resort hotels and nine ships before becoming diving director.

"I'd come home in the summers," he said. "I'm from North Dakota, and I really didn't want to spend my life down there. And if I gave up my ties here, I really wouldn't have had anything to come home to, so

to speak."

By 1986, Kraft was running his own trips through Scuba One, and the next year he quit working in Jamaica. In 1989, however, the Jamaicans sought his services again.

"They wanted me to come down," Kraft said. "They wanted me to take over the water sports program for their whole chain."

Kraft couldn't get a second work permit, however. "It's next to impossible for an American to get a permit to work in this line of work or to do anything for that matter," he said. "You can't even get job as a bar tender. That's a job where you'd be taking a Jamaican's job."

Failing to get a permit is how Kraft became a consultant for his Jamaican clients. "They said, 'We have other properties we want you to take a look at,'" he said. "I thought this was a pretty good deal, so I wrote to some of the other resorts."

Kraft said there are about 30 Jamaican resorts that may want his services. "You can't really bring Jamaicans in because they have no experience outside of the properties on their island," he said. "And they're trying to compete with dive operations worldwide, and they don't have the background."