



By LONNIE BERTSCH of the Tribune

After four years of diving in Jamaica, Randy Kraft has traded it for the prairies of North Dakota, where he teaches scuba diving.

Man's business is taking a dive -and he loves it

Struggling against snowdrifts and bone-chilling temperatures, most North Dakotans would love to head to the sun-baked beaches of the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico for the winter.

Randy Kraft has given all that up.

The Bismarck scuba diver is staying up north this year, after four years of going south to teach diving in Jamaica.

"This is the first time I've been home for Christmas in a long time," said Kraft, who is concentrating on getting his business, Scuba One, on line.

Kraft is giving a regular series of diving lessons at the YMCA, he sells scuba equipment, and even organizes traveling and diving trips.

Diving in the middle of the North Dakota prairie is not as strange as it may seem. Kraft said while southern waters are ideal, North Dakotans don't have to travel that far to have fun.

Spiritwood Lake at Jamestown is clear and warm, you can now go spear fishing in Lake Sakakawea, and Lake Superior ship wrecks make for some interesting exploration.

A native of Bismarck, Kraft's first taste of underwater work came while he was attending Moorhead State University and he entered a scuba diving class.

During spring breaks Kraft would head to the blue waters of the Bahamas where his love for the sport grew.

"It's like entering another world," Kraft said.

With a degree in finance and accounting, Kraft headed to a management position in Minneapolis

Kraft attended a 10-week scuba instructors school in California, a step which later opened doors to work in Jamaica.

Abandoning the world of financial business, Kraft eventually returned to Bismarck and began teaching scuba diving at the YMCA.

Kraft's chance to make it a regular job came in the fall of 1984, when a placement service in Jamaica called the California diving school to find experienced divers.

"It was getting cold here and business was slowing down," said Kraft, who jumped at the opportunity.

He went to work immediately at the Jamaica Hilton (now Eden II) and eventually for the Americana and Sheraton hotel chains. While helping guests with their scuba needs was a big part in those first months, Kraft eventually was put in charge of all water sports (water skiing, sport fishing, day cruises).

Kraft could have held a full-time job but he said after about four or five months he always got the urge to head north, to come home. So his springs and summers have been spent in North Dakota offering scuba lessons.

Part of the desire to leave Jamaica was that he wasn't comfortable living in a Third World country, Kraft said. His tall, blond figure definitely placed Kraft in the minority. Living expenses are very high, he said, and then there's the food. There is no Wendy's and you can't buy a pizza.

"If I'd had the same job in the United States I'd have been in seventh heaven," Kraft said.

Back in Bismarck, Kraft is determined to make Scuba One a thriving business



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Craving even more experience, in 1982

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"I've decided this is where my future is," he said.