

Underwater Speleology

Journal of the Cave Diving Section of the National Speleological Society



Volume 52, No. 3
Autumn 2025

WW26

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WINTER WORKSHOP FEBRUARY 20-27, 2026

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Photo: Daniel Riordan



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*See nsscads.org for full Grand Prize Raffle details. The Grand Prize Raffle is provided courtesy of the NSS-CDS purchased using proceeds from raffle ticket donations. No purchase or contribution necessary. Open to individuals 18 years or older. Void where prohibited.

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Underwater Speleology

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Cover image: Emily Sustarich and John Sustarich dive in King's Canyon, Jackson Blue, Mariana, FL. © Jennifer Dillaman.

A Note from the Chair

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Fall is finally here! What does that mean for you? Here in north central Florida we look forward to cooler temperatures, fewer bugs, great diving, volunteer projects, DEMA, holidays, and a peaceful second half of hurricane season. May the Atlantic continue to be mellow. Western North Carolina is still recovering from Hurricane Helene!

RIP Michael Menduno. It is with great sadness that we learned of Michael Menduno's passing just before going to press. We are grieving with, and praying for, the Menduno family. Michael (aka M2) fought valiantly to recover from a recent stroke but succumbed on Friday, 02 October. An icon of the diving world, his quirky, inquisitive nature fueled his creative mind. His humor, kindness, and generosity were hallmarks of his humanity.

M2 was an accomplished writer well before his days as the founder and editor of [AquaCORPS](#) magazine (1990-1996). He wrote about the esoteric and intriguing world of diving beyond recreational limits. There was no name for it; Michael called it "technical diving" and the term stuck. His impactful publication gave voice to divers seeking to push boundaries and to dive more thoughtfully.

We will feature a story about Michael in the next issue of *Underwater Speleology*. If you have a photograph of Michael that you'd like us to share with the community, please forward it to us.

The 2026 Winter Workshop is shaping up for Tulum, Mexico. It will be our first event ever held outside the USA and will feature a sensational lineup of speakers. Renée Power and Steve Dalcher are organizing this effort in conjunction with our hosts Claire and Lanny Vogel of Underworld Tulum. Seats are limited to 50 for this 20-27 February 2026 event. With a blend of world-class diving, fantastic food, and intimate interaction with accomplished divers and underwater photographers, this will be a unique week-long experience. Come join us! Did I mention the grand prize raffle? It's a cave diving trip for two to Tulum! Register and buy your raffle tickets in the [CDS online store](#).

The 2026 International Cave Diving Conference (ICDC) plans are shaping up. The social will be on Friday 05 June, and the conference will happen on Saturday 06 June. Attendees at the 2025 conference were unanimously positive about the venue, so we have reserved once again The Barn at Rembert Farms, Alachua, FL. Our extensive after-action review of May's conference sprouted numerous ideas for improvement.

To our readers and members: Views represented in *Underwater Speleology* articles are solely the author's and do not reflect the views of the NSS-CDS Board of Directors or of the Editor.

We advocate freedom of speech and welcome discussion. Feel free to rebut previous articles and/or to submit your own.

The magazine encourages members to submit news, stories, letters, trip and exploration reports, maps, and photos for consideration. Please contact the Editor for publication guidelines and to avoid duplication of work.

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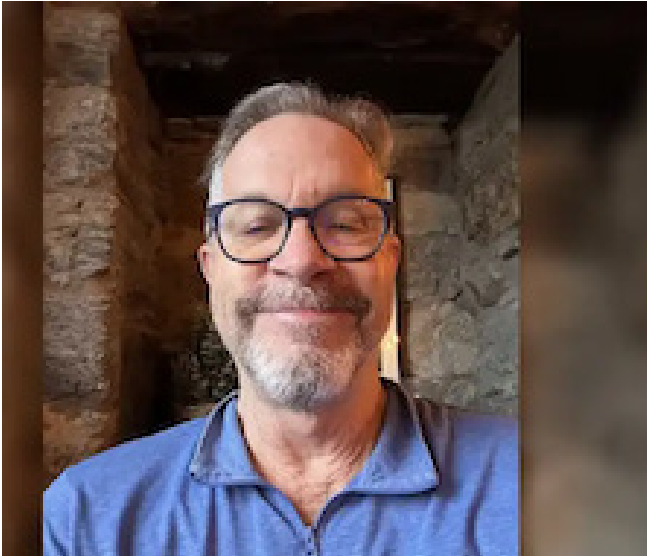
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by Fred Stratton



Michael "M2" Menduno. Courtesy InDEPTH Magazine.

We'll enact these recommendations, which will improve comfort, enjoyment, and interaction for attendees, members, and sponsors. We've already recruited two phenomenal speakers. Is there a topic or speaker you'd like to hear? Would you like to help organize the event? Let us know.

Our first online course, the NSS-CDS Cave Diver course, went live on our website in June 2025. By all accounts it has been a success. Written, edited, and tested by members of the all-volunteer Training Committee (TC), their 200+ years of cave diving experience and instructional expertise come through in the quality of the course. It also features world-class imagery contributed by NSS-CDS members. This is just the first of many courses that we will add to our e-Learning platform in the future.

The DEMA Show. This annual scuba industry event rotates among cities. This year's show will be in Orlando on 11-14 November. Your NSS-CDS team will be in booth #1267. Swing by and visit. Participating in this scuba industry show affords us the opportunity to put our message and mission into the minds of industry leaders and show participants, sign up new members, and stay attuned to industry trends and opportunities. Selling CDS swag and keeping expenses low keeps us in the black and puts our merchandise out there as walking advertisements.

Mill Creek (Alachua) Sink, which we manage for the NSS, remains threatened by Tara Forest West and Tara Phoenicia. The massive residential and commercial developments will be adjacent to the Sink, a swallet that drains many square miles in all directions. Construction has already begun in a separate approved tract. Please visit [Our Alachua Water](#) to learn what you can do to help protect this hydrologic wonder, a living artery of Florida's circulatory system known as the Floridan Aquifer.

Volunteers needed for Clear Cut Sink project. We raised \$10,000 in a matter of weeks back in early 2023 with the promise of using those funds to build infrastructure at two sinks to facilitate safe cave diving and control erosion. Our patience has paid off. The state recently approved the Clear Cut Sink project. We will need LOTS of help building stairs, platforms, and diver benches over two three-day sprints: 31 October through 02 November and 07 through 09 November. Contact Steve Dalcher or Joerg Hess to sign up. Don't miss this opportunity to become a plank owner at a unique site few divers have had the privilege to visit! Can't make it? Donate to the [Ongoing Projects Fund](#).

Edward's infrastructure. While waiting approval for these projects, we used \$1,800 of those funds to build the infrastructure at Edward's Spring. Section volunteers, led by property manager Tom "TJ" Johnson, built those improvements. They include a changing room, diver benches, stairs, and handrails. CDS divers will repair and replace the gold line later this month.

Diving Edward's involves the same processes as Cow Springs: Sign the online waiver, and reply "we are out of the water" to the gate code email when you and your teammates are topside. This is a challenging dive. Refer to these [diving guidelines](#). TJ is a good resource for visibility and flow conditions.

We have a **new property manager** at our Cow Springs property. A tip of the hat goes to John Rutledge, a veteran volunteer Cavenger who has already made his mark. Recently he supported CDS

... continued on page 15

EXPLORER OF THE YEAR:

MATT HANSEN

Interview and photos by
Rachael McCarthy

I caught up with Matt Hansen after he completed an exploration dive at Shitten Sink, where he had just pushed the end of the line through a sinister restriction.

Matt, first of all, congratulations on being named NSS-CDS Explorer of the Year. How does it feel to have your work recognized in this way?

Thank you. It's honestly humbling. I never set out to "win awards." For me, exploration has always been about curiosity, responsibility, and leaving behind something useful for other divers. Being recognized by the community that I respect so much means a lot, but I view it as a reflection of the teams, mentors, and friends who have supported me through every project. Exploration is rarely a solo pursuit. It's always a collective effort.

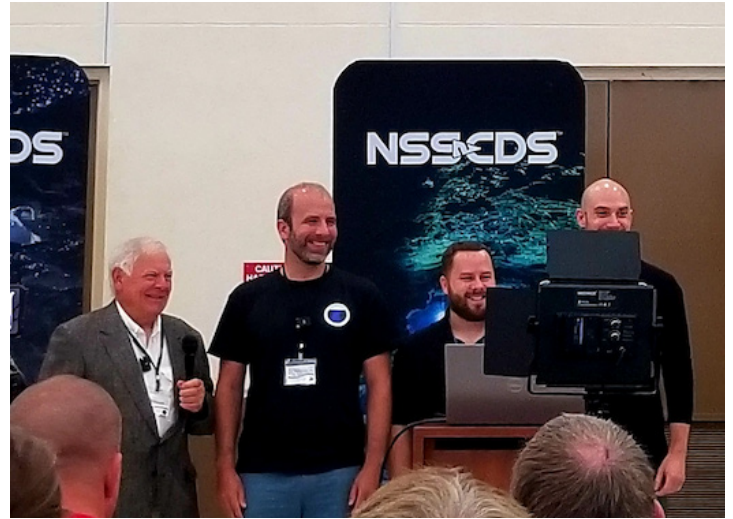
Madison Blue has been a big focus of your diving career. You not only explored and surveyed extensively there, but ultimately produced the new map. Can you walk us through that project?

Madison is one of the most complex and iconic systems in Florida. When I first started diving it seriously, I realized that the existing maps didn't capture its full scope.

Producing a new, accurate map became a long-term commitment that demanded years of survey dives. Each dive had a purpose, including laying survey line, running compass headings, measuring distances, and tying data into loops to check accuracy. That means hours of bottom time and just as much time afterward processing data in software to see if it all matched.

Sometimes you'd spend a six-hour dive to gather just a few hundred feet of usable data, but every line of numbers mattered.

From a technical standpoint, these were demanding dives involving multiple stages, complex gas



Matt (second from left) accepts his award at the 2025 International Cave Diving Conference. Photo by Rachael McCarthy.

logistics, long deco schedules, and plenty of contingency planning. Madison's flow and depth profile make it physically exhausting, and the mental focus required to record accurate survey data when you're hours into a dive is intense. Producing the map wasn't just about capturing the cave; it was about endurance, discipline, and respect for the process.

Seeing the final map come together was incredibly rewarding. It's not just a picture, it's a tool. It helps instructors teach better, helps divers plan more safely, and provides a foundation for future exploration. That's the legacy I wanted to leave at Madison.

At Manatee, your role was different. You didn't do exploration there, but you did format and produce the new map. What did that involve?

Right, I didn't do the exploration or survey at Manatee. That credit belongs to others who put in the work on the line. My role there was to take the raw survey data and produce a more polished, usable map for the community.

That process is its own kind of technical challenge. You have to translate thousands of data points into something clear, accurate, and user friendly. It's about formatting, scale, and making choices that balance scientific precision with practical readability. Divers need a map they can use for accurate planning, so presentation matters just as much as raw accuracy.

I think of it as part of stewardship. Even if I wasn't the one running the survey at Manatee, being able to take that data and give it back to the community in the form of a finished map is valuable. In the end, the goal is the same—better tools for divers, safer dives, and more complete records of these systems.

Gator Hole and the connection to Big Suck is another huge highlight of your career. Can you describe what those dives were like?

Gator Hole was one of the most challenging projects I've ever been part of. The passage is unforgiving with minimal visibility, silty conditions, and unpredictable debris. The connection to Big Suck had been suspected for years, but proving it required persistence and precision.

From a logistics standpoint, those dives were complex. There was no margin for error. Every decision had to be deliberate. Making that



Matt shows other cave divers how to rappel down to privately owned Oubliette Sink. He and Cameron Mahaffey continued exploring once below. Photo by Rachael McCarthy.



Demonstrating the rigging at Oubliette Sink. Photo by Rachael McCarthy.

connection was an incredible moment. It wasn't just about "being first" through; it was about closing a question that had lingered in the community for decades. That dive tied two systems together and reshaped our understanding of the local hydrology. To me, that's the essence of exploration. You're literally filling in the blanks on the map and expanding the story of Florida's springs.

What qualities do you think are most important for a diver to bring into exploration projects like these?

Patience and humility. Exploration is not about speed or ego, it's about precision. If you rush survey data, you get bad maps. If you let ambition override your limits, you put yourself and your team at risk.

From a technical standpoint, solid gas planning is non-negotiable. Staging, bailout, and deco planning are all critical. And you have to stay calm in the face of problems ranging from no visibility to line traps to tight restrictions.

If you can't work the problem with a clear head, you don't belong in that passage.

Finally, documentation. Exploration without documentation doesn't serve the community. A diver

who surveys and maps, even if it's not glamorous, contributes far more than someone who just "saw new passage."

What advice would you give to younger technical divers who want to get into exploration?

Build your foundation first. Master buoyancy, trim, awareness, and gas planning before you even think about survey work. Exploration pushes every skill you have, and if your fundamentals aren't solid, you'll be overwhelmed.

Find mentors. I wouldn't be where I am without the divers who guided me, challenged me, and sometimes told me "not yet." Listen to them.

Exploration should always be approached with respect for the cave, the history, and the risks. And when you do get into exploration, document it. Keep good notes, share your data, and contribute to the community. The real legacy of exploration isn't the dive you did, it's the record you leave behind.

Looking ahead, what excites you most about the future of cave diving exploration?

Technology is opening doors all the time. Rebreathers, DPVs, and mapping software are allowing us to go farther, stay longer, and document more accurately.

But I'm just as excited about the people coming up behind us. There are younger divers with the right mindset and commitment to documentation. If the

work I've done at Madison, Manatee, or Gator Hole inspires even a few of them to pick up a compass and a slate, or to think about exploration as a responsibility rather than just an adventure, then I've done my job.

Final question, when all is said and done, how do you hope people remember your contributions?

I hope they say I left useful tools behind. The Madison map, the formatted Manatee map, the Gator Hole connection, those are tangible things the community can use. But beyond that, I hope people see that exploration is about stewardship. It's not about being the deepest or the farthest, it's about taking the time to make diving safer, clearer, and better for everyone who comes after.

If that's my legacy, I'll be proud.

Author's Note: *Matt Hansen's recognition as NSS-CDS Explorer of the Year is a testament to his blend of technical precision, patient survey work, and dedication to community stewardship. His extensive survey and mapping at Madison, his production of the Manatee map, and his role in connecting Gator Hole to Big Suck reflect a career defined not just by discovery, but by responsibility. For Hansen, exploration is as much about what you leave behind as what you find.*

Rachael McCarthy contributes frequently to Underwater Speleology.

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GROWTH AND NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE NSS-CDS

by Adam Hughes

The 2025 International Cave Diving Conference's resounding success offers the CDS an opportunity to reinvest directly back into our community. Thanks to our members' and attendees' strong support, we are now able to expand our infrastructure, setting the stage for larger and more ambitious events in the years ahead. We will continue to grow our presence abroad with exciting international opportunities such as the upcoming 2026 Winter Workshop in Tulum, Mexico. These efforts reflect our membership's strength and our increasing momentum as an organization dedicated to both safety and community.

The NSS-CDS [online store](#) is currently running sales to help clear out older merchandise as part of this movement. Members can also look forward to an entirely new line of high-quality items soon to arrive, including polos, sweaters, sun shirts, tumblers, and more. These additions are a direct result of the support shown at this year's conference. They represent another way the Section is working to give back to its members.

Be on the lookout for these new items as they arrive. They are an exciting reflection of the continued growth and positive direction of the NSS-CDS.



[Adam Hughes](#) is the NSS-CDS Operations Manager. You can reach him via email or phone at 561-704-3038.

THE NEW FACE OF OUR CLASSIC AWARDS

by Fred Stratton

It's less about numbers than what they represent.

Illustrations by Fred Stratton and Shannon Perry

Earning an NSS-CDS Safe Cave Diving Award for post-training dives represents the commitment, perseverance, physical exertion, and mental discipline required to plan and execute safe overhead excursions.

One Hundred Safe Cave Dives

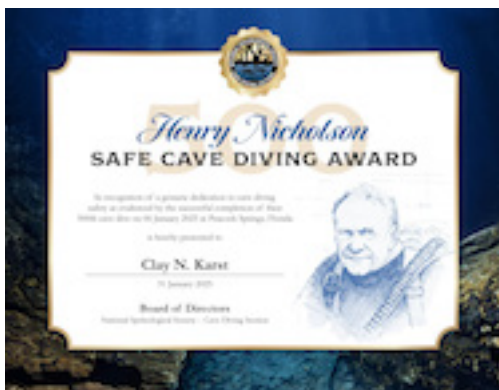
Florida native Abe Davis, who was enslaved prior to the end of the Civil War, was renowned throughout Suwannee County Florida for his ability to breath hold dive into Little River Spring cavern in spite of its hydrant-like flow. Completing 100 safe cave dives after full cave training earns a diver the Abe Davis award.



Five Hundred Safe Cave Dives

Henry Nicholson's name is synonymous with public safety diving. As a sheriff's department dive team leader, Henry raised awareness of deficient training and improper equipment at the 1982 NSS-CDS workshop after he and his team experienced a close call. Out of this workshop sprang a collaborative effort among the NSS-CDS, the NACD, and law enforcement to address the identified shortfalls. These efforts led to Henry's and Robert Laird's forming the International Underwater Cave Rescue & Recovery ([IUCRR](#)) organization in 1999.

The Henry Nicholson award honors his contributions. Divers earn this award after completing 500 safe post-training cave dives. (The Nicholson Tunnel in the Peacock Springs cave system also honors Henry. Hey, there's an idea for your 500th cave dive)!



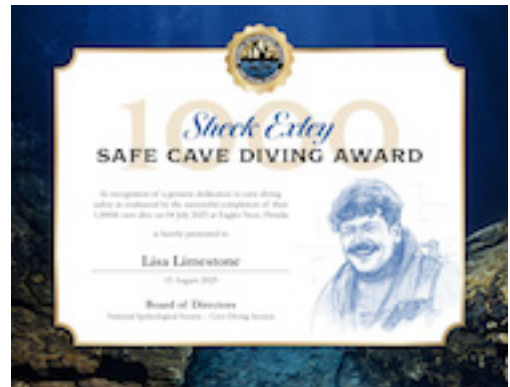
One Thousand Safe Cave Dives

This diver was the first chairman of the NSS-CDS when it was formed in 1973. He authored numerous books and articles and taught untold numbers of cave divers. Some credit him with saving access to many cave systems in the 1970s when an alarming rise in cave diving deaths spurred talk of outlawing access. In a

notable case, the Walton County sheriff dynamited access to the cave section in Morrison Spring after a string of deaths alarmed locals.

By now you know we are talking about Irby Sheck Exley, Jr.

At the age of 23, Sheck became the first person to make 1,000 safe cave dives. To honor that achievement and his myriad contributions to our sport, two awards are named for him - the Sheck Exley award for 1,000 post-training cave dives and the International Exley award for having made 1,000 dives in at least five different countries.



These classic awards adorn the walls of many divers. Their format has remained unchanged for eons.

We decided to honor these icons with a fresh look. I teamed with talented artist Shannon Perry (an NSS-CDS member and very active CAVENGER volunteer) to refresh the certificates with color and images of their namesakes.

What do you think?

Have you achieved one or more of these milestones? Apply by tapping on this link. <https://nsscads.org/safety/>



...and congratulations to the NSS-CDS members who recently earned Safety Awards...

Abe Davis: Lauren Graefe, Robert Graefe, Matt Lamb, C. J. Pierce, and Leonard Smith

Henry Nicholson: Adam Hughes

Award Profile:

The NSS-CDS 2025

VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR:

JOERG HESS

Interview by Gayle Hall

The NSS-CDS Volunteer of the year epitomizes the spirit of volunteerism. The recipient has selflessly given time and energy in service to the cave diving community and to others. Joerg Hess is the 2025 recipient for his generous application of his electronic, educational, and construction talents. The award was presented at the International Cave Diving Conference, May 31, 2025.

Joerg frequently volunteers as a team leader for NSS-CDS work days. He worked on the Hurricane Idalia recovery project at Wes Skiles Peacock Springs State Park and has put in many productive workdays at Cow Springs. At Madison Blue, Joerg led a work party to remove and replace old benches and responded to an urgent request to repair broken fencing around the headspring. He has contributed to landowner relations, debris clearing, and other work at Edward's Spring.

As an educator, Joerg contributed an entire chapter on gas planning for the NSS-CDS online Cave Diver Course. And he generously donated rebreather training as a grand raffle prize for the 2025 International Cave Diving Conference.

We caught up with Joerg to talk about his numerous contributions to NSS-CDS and the cave diving community.

How did you start diving?

I started diving in Germany when I was a kid. My Dad was an open water diver, and I used to breathe from his tanks in the pool. I got my Open Water certification when I was 13. In my twenties, I was in a dive club at the University.

I came to the US for the first time in 1998. By that time, I was a Divemaster and Open Water Instructor. One day following a dive in Fort Lauderdale, our group stopped at Devil's Den to rinse our gear. Man,



Joerg Hess (right) accepting his 2025 Volunteer of the Year Award. Presented by James Chandler (left) and Gayle Hall (middle). Photo by Tom "TJ" Johnson.

was that awesome! Later during my Nitrox class, my instructor said, "You look comfortable – you should be a cave diver." So I gave myself cave diver training for Christmas. Originally, I was booked with Steve Berman, but when his father passed away, I moved to Reggie Ross. I took my Full Cave with John Orłowski.

I was still living in Germany then, but coming to the US frequently for work. In 1999, I had the opportunity to do advanced rebreather research at Florida State University. In 2002, I became one of six professors at Florida State University (FSU) for Underwater Crime Scene Investigation, building the program from scratch.

In 2004, I earned Intro to Cave and rebreather instructor certifications. I took my my PhD in the United Kingdom in 2005. In 2009, I came back to the United States and worked with Greg Stanton at Wakulla Dive Center, co-teaching and co-writing standards for the International Association of Nitrox and Technical Divers (IANTD). Many instructors have used my slides.

..continued on page 14...

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THE NATIONAL SCUBA DIVERSITY SOCIETY
IN DEPTH
GET DEEPER INTO DIVING

Volunteer of the Year...from page 12...

A few years ago, I wanted to go back to teaching. After Tom Mount died, I began working my way up on the instructor side. Interestingly, although standards have changed, many old-school instructors are not evolving.

I enjoy fun diving, teaching, and exploring with Karst Underwater Research (KUR).

What was your most memorable dive?

In 2003, I did my 1000th cave dive at Hole in the Wall with Greg Stanton. We came out late at night to a full moon! It was only then that I told him that it was my 1000th.

What inspired you to volunteer?

Reggie Ross inspired me during my training with him. He instilled the ethics of cave diving – take only pictures, leave only bubbles, waste only time. I appreciated early on that the cave community only works if you give back. I have no excuse not to! I've met people like Steve Dalcher and others who are great to work with. It is a privilege to meet people who move the community forward and aren't in it for the money.



Do you have a favorite project?

It's the exploration at Peacock Springs 3, where we (KUR) are still pushing limits. Greg Stanton used Hendley's Castle for Trimix training – there is a tiny hole in the bottom that line goes through. That is where we are exploring!

And Cow Springs – my name is on the map! In 2002, I spent two weeks there from before daylight till after dark! Someone might have thought my car was abandoned there. I was in every corner of that cave, mapping.

What do you get out of volunteering?

Community. The amount of horsepower – what we can achieve together. We can move mountains! After hurricanes, for example, seeing the destruction and being part of the cleanup is inspiring. Working toward a common goal, seeing the camaraderie and feeling the passion – I personally find it very satisfying. Whatever issues people may have, they put aside in order to accomplish the goals.

What advice would you give to someone interested in volunteering?

Just show up! You may think you don't know what you can do, but everyone can contribute. If nothing else, bring good jokes! You may start the day as random people, and end up as friends. Especially for new divers, you can meet people you can go cave diving with. Take the first step – look at the calendar and if you have availability, just show up!

What does it mean to you to win Volunteer of the Year?

I felt humbled to have received the award from the NSS-CDS, which has done so much to recognize my work. I'm very proud of the plaque I received and look at it every day! Many people don't realize that in Europe, access to cave diving sites is controlled by specific groups. Divers have to join each organization in order to be able to dive their caves. What NSS-CDS has created is lots of caves open for all cave divers – State and County Parks, private sites. I am truly honored.

Gayle Hall is a past NSS-CDS Board of Directors member.

A Note from the Chair - continued from page 5

member Joshua Lange, a professional arborist, who climbed 60 ft/18 m into the air to remove a heavy branch that was dangling above the changing rooms and diver benches.

John is your first point of contact for Cow Springs issues. He has received several calls about the gate lock being inoperative. Tips to opening it: Precisely enter the four-digit code. Pull the two halves of the lock in opposite directions. It will open.

The stairs at our own Cow Springs are nearing the end of their lifecycle. We will be replacing the entire stairs and any other structure showing signs of deterioration. We will keep you apprised and put out a call for volunteers.

Go dive. Have fun. Be safe!

Fred Stratton is the 2025-2026 NSS-CDS Chair. He has been cave diving since 2003.

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BIG WORLD, SMALL COMMUNITY:

WHO IS IN YOUR CIRCLE OF TRUST?

by Fred Stratton

Ask 10 people to define the word community, and you'll likely get 11 different answers. The word derives from the Latin *communitas*, translated as public spirit or community. Tribes were the earliest communities, bound by blood and purpose. In a world of eight billion people, there is a nearly infinite number of possible communities. Yet most communities form organically from a survival standpoint or intentionally when likeminded individuals pool their resources to pursue common interests.

Underwater Speleology readers share an affinity for scuba diving, particularly in overhead environments. We naturally gravitate toward others who share our interests. It is easier than ever in this interconnected world to find kindred spirits. There is a social media group for just about any hobby, profession, and avocation in existence with hundreds of new ones sprouting every day.

Enter the cave diving community. How did you find it? Were you welcomed with open arms and a gentle embrace, a hearty handshake, and a smile? Or have you found us an insular crew wary of newcomers? First impressions matter. Positive ones can launch a thousand possibilities; a negative one is a giant buzzkill.

Many cave divers stumble onto this community by chance. I had been diving for 14 years when I received orders to Pensacola, FL, home of great ocean diving and the western gateway to springs in the Florida Panhandle. My friend Nate Davey (an NSS-CDS member) and I took a NAUI cavern course with Scott Hunsucker, who at the time was an active WKPP team diver. We were mesmerized by the lure of what was beyond our limited range in the caverns of Vortex Spring and Twin Caves. We built experience and, after finding another respected cave diving instructor, completed our full cave training several months later.



Good times at the 2025 NSS-CDS Winter Workshop. Photo by Nicole Alarid.



Joining fellow CDS members at a work day builds community. Volunteers replaced three diver benches at Madison Blue Springs State Park. Photo by Erica Lewis.

Every diver has a network with links to other divers and nodes from which flow knowledge, experience, gas, and gear. These nodes include instructors, training agencies, and dive shops. Links radiate outward from these nodes to thousands of divers around the world. (Think six degrees of cave diving)! That network can be a tremendously useful resource.

Do instructors matter? Yes! One of the most-asked questions when meeting another cave diver, especially a potential future teammate, is “who was your instructor”? The answer can mean the difference between being certified as an individual and being qualified to dive as a strong individual diver with a team-oriented philosophy. I have observed a stronger sense of community in the latter.

Do agencies matter? Yes! The stark reality is that although training standards are similar from agency to agency, the path to cave instructor status is NOT the same among agencies. Therefore the knowledge, experience, and ability to educate—not just run down a slate checklist, vary—widely.

Earning one’s cave diving instructor credentials should be rigorous and earned through an apprenticeship under tutelage from a master. So too

should earning any overhead certification. Seek an NSS-CDS instructor, and you will feel pride in earning your stripes, be they as a Single Tank or Cavern Tech Diver, Full Cave, Cave DPV, Advanced Sidemount, or any of the other overhead courses the Section offers.

Is your community healthy? How do you assess the health of your community? Do you feel wanted and valued? This may sound like a softball question, but think about it. Every human being wants to feel as if he or she matters.

So back to the question of being welcome. My full cave instructor, Walter Ross, was a magnanimous person, giving of himself in so many ways. We ended the course with 50% more runtime than standards required. He always underpromised and overdelivered. That level of commitment to his students earned loyalty, trust, and respect, because for him those traits were a two-way street. Along the way he instilled in us the pride of achieving a qualification that few land dwellers achieve while grounding us in humility and respect for the sport and the environment in which we play.

Our personal values as divers. Do you feel more naturally drawn to others who possess the same values? If you went through a “zero-to-hero” ascent



Citizens rally at Alachua City Hall in support of protecting Mill Creek Sink. Photo by Fred Stratton.

to full cave diver status, others who “earned their stripes” after diving for a while before climbing the next rung of the certification ladder may not respect such an approach. The rapid ladder climbers may have a YOLO approach—“You Only Live Once”—that makes sense to them, viewing the patient path as tedious.

Can these two camps coexist? Perhaps not. Some will say the former group burns out and moves on to other pursuits, while more deliberate divers claim a deeper commitment to their craft and community. In short, they earned it while others bought their C cards. (Read the superb article “[Zero to Hero: Shortcutting Training in an Alien Environment](#)” by Roger Williams in *Underwater Speleology* Vol. 51, No. 3, Autumn 2024, for more on this topic).

Consider the idea that deliberate divers have an obligation to engage the ladder climbers. The deliberate diver can slow down the YOLO diver and introduce him or her to ancient fossils and cool side passages that they normally overlook in their zeal to reach a personal penetration record.

Breaking bread together is an ancient human ritual. Here in north central Florida, it could be a Farm Stand milkshake in Branford, smoky delights at B-B-Q Bill’s in Chiefland, or liquid lunch at our many

microbreweries. Many NSS-CDS instructors conduct post-course debriefs over a meal. It’s an effective instructional method and a particularly effective way of making divers feel like they are part of something good - a community of people who venture into potentially deadly environs and work together to plan, execute, and debrief dives with the goal of being better on each dive than the last, and supporting each other in the process.

Consider: What do you expect from the cave diving community, and what are you willing to do to make this community better? These questions are intertwined, right? Should we



Tom “TJ” Johnson and RB Havens work on the Orange Grove stairs project. Photo by Fred Stratton.



Renée Power, Nicole Alarid, and Jenny Dillaman. Photo by Fred Stratton.

expect more from a community than we ourselves are willing to contribute? Socialism fails everywhere it is tried because when a central authority apportion resources, there is little incentive to excel or to give back.

The NSS-CDS is only as strong as the number and involvement of its members. Earlier this year we achieved a milestone in reaching 1,000 members for the first time in our history. Many people contributed to that milestone, and it is up to us to build upon it. More members means more resources, which opens opportunities for the organization.

Ways to contribute. There are so many ways to contribute to the NSS-CDS in particular and the cave diving community in general. I've just scratched the surface. Perhaps these ideas will spawn more.

- Join and maintain NSS-CDS membership.
- Encourage your friends to join the NSS-CDS...and then invite them to go diving.
- Volunteer at a work project such as the upcoming construction project at Clearcut Sink in the Florida Panhandle. (See details on page 5).
- Shop in the CDS online store. Proceeds support our mission.

- Support domestic scuba manufacturers. They are local and way more responsive to customer input than international corporate brands.
- Volunteer as a CAVENGER at a Winter Workshop or International Cave Diving Conference.
- Tag the NSS-CDS in your social media and help spread the word of our good works.
- Encourage your businesses to be a sponsor at our annual events and to advertise in *Underwater Speleology*.
- Write an article for *Underwater Speleology*, DAN's [Alert Diver](#) or [InDepth](#) online magazine.
- Take a scuba course from an NSS-CDS instructor. Broaden your horizons, elevate your skills, and improve as a teammate.
- Shop at your local technical dive shop that supports cave diving rather than shopping online. (I met Bill Main while ordering a drysuit at Cave Country Dive Shop. 'Can't get that experience on Amazon)!
- Volunteer to help clean up your local waters be they oceans, rivers, lakes, quarries, or springs.
- Join conservation-focused organizations such as [Our Alachua Water](#).



Left to right: Dan Alix, Michael Menduno, and Dominic Castrignano at 2025 ICDC. Photo by Fred Stratton.



Post Hurricane Idalia reconstruction at Wes Skiles Peacock Springs SP, January 2024. Photo by Fred Stratton.

- Contribute to conservation organizations such as the [Florida Springs Institute](#) or [North Florida Springs Alliance](#).
-

I'll finish with a story by renowned leadership coach Lolly Daskal titled "Whose job is it anyway?"

This is a story about four people named Everybody, Somebody, Anybody, and Nobody. There was an important job to be done, and Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that, because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it, but Nobody realized that Everybody wouldn't do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have.

To be the organization we aspire to be, we have to roll up our sleeves and be that somebody. Won't you join me?!

Fred Stratton is the 2025-2026 NSS-CDS Chair.

NSS-CDS Committees Need Members

There's always plenty to do at NSS-CDS. One great way to become more involved with the Section is to sign up for one of the committees or subcommittees listed below. Share your special skills, meet other cave divers, and possibly gain a dive buddy or two.

If you're interested or want more information, please contact [Fred Stratton](#).

COMMITTEES AND SUBCOMMITTEES

Communications

- a) IT Subcommittee: [Jennifer Dillaman](#), Coordinator
- b) Website Subcommittee: TBD
- c) Social Media Subcommittee: TJ Mueller, Coordinator
- d) *Underwater Speleology*: [Barbara Dwyer](#), Coordinator

Membership

- a) Awards Subcommittee: PENDING
- b) Elections Subcommittee: Kelly Jessop
- c) Workshop/Conference Subcommittee: *ad hoc*
- d) Fundraising Subcommittee: VACANT

Safety

- a) Accident Analysis Subcommittee: Charlie Roberson, Coordinator. Doug Ebersole, Lamar Hires, Frauke Tillmans, Larry Meyer, Vince Ferris
- b) Line/Markers Subcommittee: Ken Sallot, Coordinator. Michael Kutnya, Kyle Martin, Justin Judd, Chris Brock, Jim Wyatt.

Training: [Chris Brock](#), Training Director Science

- a) Geology Subcommittee: Pati Spellman, PhD, Coordinator
- b) Biology Subcommittee: Thomas Sawicki, PhD, Coordinator. Marin Hawk.
- c) Conservation Subcommittee: Chelsea Dinon, Coordinator, Marin Hawk Patricia Spellman, PhD, Emily Sustarich, John Sustarich, Angela Teal.
- d) Cave Cartography Subcommittee: Jason Richards, Coordinator, Alex Brett.

Cave Access

- a) Properties Subcommittee: [Steve Dalcher](#), Coordinator
- b) Landowner Relations Subcommittee: Ian Parrish

Property Managers

- a) Cow Springs LLC: Cameron Mahaffey
- b) School Sink LLC: Bob Beckner
- c) Mill Creek Sink: Andy Pitkin, Charlie Roberson

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2025 ad rates are as follows:

CDS Supporter for \$350 per year:

- Four 1/4 page color ads in four consecutive issues of UWS
- 10% discount on any additional advertising in UWS
- Listing as a CDS Supporter in UWS and the website
- Prices adjusted for larger ads:
- 1/2 page \$550/year
- Full page \$750/year
- 1/4 page on inside front or back cover \$450/year
- 1/2 page on inside front or back cover \$700/year
- Full page on inside front or back cover \$950/year

Per-Issue Pricing

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- \$150 per issue for a 1/4 page ad on the inside front or back cover
- \$250 per issue for a 1/2 page ad on the inside front or back cover
- \$350 per issue for a full page ad on the inside front or back cover

CDS Instructor Ads:

- \$100 per year for a 1/4 page ad

For specs and more information, please contact UWS's Ad Manager [Nancy Winfree](#).



Why should I join the NSS-CDS?

The benefits of membership include:

- Being part of the largest cave diving organization in the United States.
- Helping to shape cave diving's future by electing leaders to represent your interests.
- Receiving discounts on store merchandise and meeting registration fees.
- Accessing members-only content on nsscds.org.
- Receiving Underwater Speleology magazine in your mailbox - 4 issues annually.
- Diving admission at members-only sites (Cow Springs, School Sink, Mill Creek/Alachua Sink) AND,
- Getting invited to work parties and picnics. Join your fellow divers to improve parks and dive areas! (Membership is not required for work parties).

Join on the web site: <https://nsscds.org>.

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