



# Jim and Julie Joseph

Port Charlotte, Florida



Fantasea Scuba

## *Learn about Florida Entrepreneur Jim and Julie Joseph:*

Jim and Julie Joseph, husband and wife and owners of Fantasea Scuba, have owned and operated their local dive shop since Labor Day weekend of 1994. For the past 24 years, they've provided residents of Charlotte County, and various government agencies, with a reliable source for scuba equipment and dive certifications for every skill level and need. Jim and Julie have worked hard to establish their great reputation, and like most entrepreneurial journeys, this one has a very humble beginning.

"I've been on the water my whole life," Jim said. "However, it wasn't until I was offered a scuba class, which I took, that I became hooked."

Not long after, Jim met Julie. She was new to town and worked as a hair dresser in a salon Jim went to. He couldn't get his friend to make an

introduction, so he scheduled an appointment with Julie. The two met, hit it off and, a few months later, got married. Two years later, in September of 1994, Jim and Julie made another bold move. They identified a business opportunity and dove in.

"At the time, Julie was still working in the hair salon and I was still a car painter in the body shop, but I also started working on the side as a scuba instructor," Jim said. "I came home one day, after teaching a scuba course, and told Julie that we should open our own dive shop. She was on-board and before we knew it, the stars aligned and we opened a very small retail shop with one compressor. We rolled out the change jug for working capital and put everything we made back into the business."

Jim explained that in the dive shop business, you don't just order this product or that product and carry whatever you want. You have dealerships and lines of products that you have to first go through. You're required to first become an approved dealer. Once that happens, you're assigned to certain territories. As a small shop, the problem Jim and Julie ran into was not getting responses from the manufacturers. Fortunately, they had a friend in the business and he helped them get connected with AquaLung, a manufacture of the world's premier scuba diving equipment for professional and recreational use. The business took off and within six months, Fantasea Scuba outgrew their original location. They moved to their present day location and not long after, Jim was able to quit his day job to exclusively focus on the new business. Julie had been full-time all along. Over time they grew the business by adding classes and certification programs as Jim continued adding to his own impressive list of diving credentials.

Jim shared some present day challenges that keep the husband and wife team on their toes. "Changing markets and dealing with the Internet," he said. "In the early days of the Internet, purchasing equipment online often times meant no warranties and the sellers, who had no overhead, did a lot of price gauging. Today, instead of fighting these guys, the manufactures made them all dealers. The problem now for brick and mortars is buying habits. People are getting used to shopping online. Unfortunately, you don't always know what you're buying and you don't get the same level of customer support that we provide. If you buy something from us, I'll teach you how to use it. If it breaks, we'll give you a loaner until we can fix it. You don't get that when you buy something from Amazon."

Looking ahead, Jim mentioned retirement with a laugh, but moved on and explained that he and Julie are still focused on expanding the business and continuing to provide services for local and federal agencies. As a Course Director for The National Association of Underwater Instructors (NAUI) Jim provides Instructor Courses where he's able to train the instructor trainers. He's currently training Border Patrol agents and has worked with several county Sheriff's offices including, Charlotte, DeSoto, Hendry, as well as the City of Punta Gorda Police and Fire.

What advice does Jim have for aspiring entrepreneurs looking to make the plunge? "The unknown can be scary, but if you're passionate about what you're doing, your customers will take notice. Location is very important for a brick and mortar. Also, it's crucial that you know your market and your competitors. There has to be a need in the area for

what you want to do. We've had two dive shops in town open and close in the last two years. They didn't do their proper research and they underestimated the competition."

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