

That's My Line



Dr. George Benjamin Underwater explorer

by Murray Moore

Dr. George Benjamin says that he once told a woman at a party who asked him if he was the famous underground diver, "Madam, you don't know what you're talking about." But, in a sense, she was right, he went on.

Dr. Benjamin, born in Russia, a holder of a Ph. D., a trapshooter at the Olympics, and the owner of a home on Midland Point for over 30 years, told Jacques Cousteau, the marine documentary filmmaker, what he needed to know to film spectacular underwater caves in the Caribbean.

Dr. Benjamin told Midland Rotarians Wednesday that his answer to Jacques Cousteau's question, "What constitutes a good dive?", was, "I count my divers. If everyone is alive and happy, then that is a successful dive."

The founder of Benjamin Laboratories has been diving for most of his life. "Don't ask me how old I am." When asked regardless of his protestation, he answered, "I'm almost a senior citizen - almost."

Dr. Benjamin confessed to having a taste for adventure, but his need for thrills has always been tempered by common sense. "Diving is dangerous but I am a very careful man. I don't go beyond safe limits."

In Florida alone between 20 and 30 divers die annually because they are not careful, he said. "Years ago, somebody saw a hole, put tanks on their back, and dove in. They had no chance of getting out."

On Dr. Benjamin's dives he and the other members of his group are never far from the safety line which is secured on their boat. He described dives into underwater caves during which he and his companions have

gone several hundred feet down and a farther distance sideways, much of the way through narrow underwater passages through which strong currents ebb and low with the turn of the tide.

The sea is not the only enemy in the Caribbean. Dr. Benjamin has brought his boat to Georgian Bay rather than leave it in the Caribbean because of the threat to life and property there from drug smugglers. He mentioned a friend who was wounded and whose boat was drilled by 60 bullets.

He was attracted to this area because of Georgian Bay, and the opportunity it offers. However he dives here only to keep fit, he said.

Through Dr. Benjamin's collecting of samples from stalagmites found in underwater caves has been a help in scientists' mapping of the earth's surface when the seas were at a different height. "I would like to hold some world records but it's not worth it" to go beyond safe limits in diving, he explained. He admitted nevertheless to being "quite crazy" for wanting to dive into underwater caves. It offers the opportunity "to test man's ability to test nature's destructive forces," he said.

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Sixty years and 132,000 cords of wood later

It will be 60 years next month since the first Forest Management Agreement was signed in the province.

To mark this historic event, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and the Corporation of the county of Simcoe are to host an all-day event in Springwater park and at Hendrie Forest near Midhurst.

At the Tuesday, May 4 Diamond Jubilee Celebration, there will be forest tours, presentations, a tree planting and a special luncheon.

In addition the media will be offered helicopter rides from the MNR's district office so as to get a bird's-eye view (and pictures) of this beautifully managed forest site which has produced more than 132,000 cords of wood products since the initial agreement was signed back in 1922.

The best advice to those planning to attend the day's functions: dress warmly, the day may be chilly.



Flowers from the boss

Marlene MacDonald, left, and Heather Keck, were among the secretaries taken to the Athenian Hall Wednesday as guests of their Rotarian employers. Each secretary received a desk set with flowers after the noon meal and program. This week was Secretaries' Week.

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