

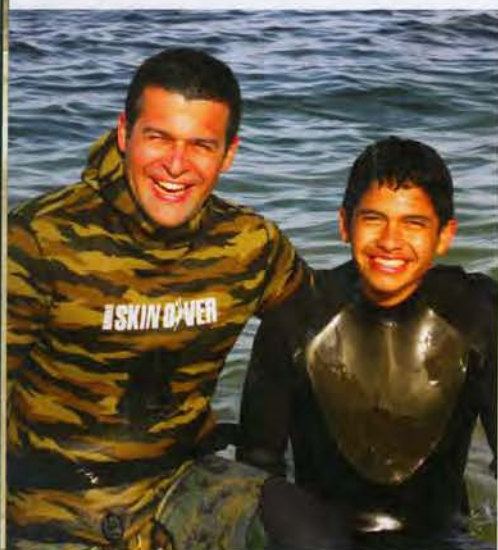




Diving for a Cause

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**Spearfishermen welcome,** image that! Founder of Diving for a Cause (DFAC) Colleen Gallagher has struck upon a magical mix for a week's spearfishing adventure—fun and giving back. While enjoying spearfishing in exotic locales, participants have the opportunity to give something of themselves to their hosts. They donate their fish, plant trees, help paint and supply local schools, and they introduce children to the wonders of the ocean at their doorstep.



**WORDS**  
*Terry Maas*

**PHOTOGRAPHS**  
*Diving for a Cause*

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**THE DFAC TEAM ORGANIZES TRIPS** by researching worthy venues, often in countries south of the border, where they achieve discounts from local correspondents and where trip participants will have an opportunity to support the local community. I love this concept. How many times have you traveled to a foreign country and felt a tug of guilt as you travel to your dive location, passing by neighborhoods in obvious need? Sure, some donated fish and a few days of community service can be viewed as a tokenism. However, these deeds can have a lasting impact on the children and the communities.

While surfing Facebook, I happened upon a picture of a group of happy divers, standing in the surf sporting grins and quality fish. The scene was familiar to me where 11 years earlier contestants in an International Blue Water Spearfishing Records Committee gold cup stood on the same beach holding a similar catch. After a few days musing over the DFAC picture, a not-so-subtle difference emerged. I'm not knocking spearfishing contests—I love them—but the group dynamics were clearly different.

Our highly competitive group had spent its energies working on strategy and skills that culminate in a tournament that yields one winner and 20 losers. The spearos in the DFAC group were all winners. They directed their energies working together in a community-service project. Besides donating their fish to a local orphanage, the divers each took a child into the water where, using donated masks, they introduced the kids to reef wonders just beyond the surf. Now, that's giving back.

Almost once a month, the DFAC team picks a worthy location and begins to lay the groundwork with local correspondents—usually local divers, or dive-business entrepreneurs, who see the win-win of hosting a group of spearfishermen interested in their local community. DFAC arranges discounts for boats, meals and lodging and finds worthy institutions for their service goals.

A typical trip lasts a week, which includes two travel days, leaving five for trip activities. DFAC does its best to keep trip packages in the range of \$700 to \$1,000. The package covers air fare, dive boats, meals and lodging. Alcohol, transits to and from the airport, and



fishing licenses are extra. Often divers meet in Ventura, California, or join up on site for a pre-dive orientation, which includes information on the fish most likely to yield the greatest value when sold for the benefit of the local charity. Here divers will learn about the local customs and the institutions that they will interact with on their days of service. Divers usually spend the next two days diving and

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enjoying spearfishing. The following day, the group participates in community service. The next day they dive again, and the last day is again devoted to service. While there are usually about 8 spearos, participants are encouraged to bring significant others to join the trip.

Colleen is supported by her capable board members. Corporate officers, treasurer Nicole Peters and vice president Michael Brookins are supported by board members Ben Hyson, Brian Kiddy and Barry Krupp. DFAC has been recognized as an IRS designated charitable organization (501C3), which means that participants may deduct most, if not all of their trip fees. (You'll have to check with your own accountant.)

Colleen is an accomplished ICU charge nurse who also trains new nurses in the nuances of critical nursing. Having raised two great boys, loving and sharing comes naturally to her. Like many of us, she started her diving career using scuba. Her close friendship with Northern California spearo Bonnie Row drew her to freediving and now her tanks gather dust while she travels the globe. A visionary, Colleen connected the dots in her life—giving, service to others and spearfishing—and developed an organization with a mission that resonates with spearos.

This usually low-key gal, who is happy with pan-sized fish, is no slouch when it comes to spearfishing. Her world record marlin, recognized by both the IBRSC and IUSA, was landed just 4 years after she began freediving. She is certain that her now deceased mentor Bonnie was with her every moment as she speared and landed her record catch, coincidentally on her inaugural DFAC trip.



## Sharing Praise for DFAC

**JOSH RUSSO**, a frequent DFAC diver says, "I was honored to be a part of the 2011 DFAC Nicaragua trip. We went down with high hopes and no one was disappointed. We sold the fish we speared at the market to pay for the chemicals to fumigate the town and treat all the standing water. We donated ten fans to the clinic because it has few windows, poor air circulation, and people were reluctant to see a doctor when it was hot. We packed as much school supplies in our bags as we could with the weight restrictions and donated over 125 pounds to the children. (stickers are the big thing with Nica children) With what was left over, we bought a pig, had a BBQ, and fed the entire town one night. We passed out candy for the children as we went door-to-door with a representative from the government to ask for permission to treat the standing water and the parents eyes were glistening as much as the children's at the thought of a hard candy treat. It felt like we really made a difference in these people's lives and the truth is, it made a big difference in our lives as well.

In La Paz, Mexico Josh remembers, "The kids (orphans) were all over us. They were so happy to see us and the kids that we'd snorkeled with on Wednesday ran up to their dive buddy with their friends and we all laughed and joked. Then we went inside for dinner and a presentation of the fish to the children and certificates of appreciation for the divers. It was an incredible feeling to see how grateful they were for our efforts. We played soccer

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well into the night, playing and joking. When it was time to leave you could tell it was too soon because no one wanted to leave and some of the kids were grabbing us by the arms as if to keep us from leaving. The language communication may not have been fluent but the feelings were mutual. We were all grateful for the efforts and the friendships made that week. DFAC is awesome. The impact that it has on the children is only part of the gift, the impact on the divers and others who hear about what we're doing is incredible. I won't soon forget the experience and I look forward to going back and being able to do better for the children."

**TIM HATLER** of Palapas Ventana is one of the local representatives. "Diving for a Cause comes back again and again to the same town - my town where I live and work - I work with them on ongoing projects that do make a difference - our schools get painted, parks get shade trees - next trip we will paint a mural, raise money for a shade roof - little by little these projects add up - DFAC will continue to improve our town park each trip as well - And the fish donation? It goes a long way. Thanks Colleen and all the DFAC divers I can't wait till you guys return in April...."

**SANTIAGO OLACHEA** works for the Catholic orphanage in La Paz as an outreach coordinator. He says, "Padre Fernando and the kids were super happy to meet DFAC and are so thankful for your donation and the wonderful time they experienced with DFAC group. The diving session (where seasoned divers took children to see the reefs) with the group at Palapas Ventana, really touched the kids hearts, all the way back the kids were talking about their water experience and the great friends they just met, definitely friendship and kindness do not need language to communicate."

National Champion **BRANDI EASTER** recalls, "I was impressed at the diversity of people, divers and non-divers, from all over the US, Canada and Mexico who participated in 2011 April LaPaz DFAC, all who shared the same desire to give back." Another participant Matthew Davidchuk says, "The DFAC April 2011 trip to Lapaz, Mexico was amazing. Meeting and snorkeling with the orphans from Lapaz was something I'll never forget. We were paired up one diver with one orphan and despite the language barrier showed them the basics of using a mask, snorkel, and fins then went out to explore together the rich sea life in the nearby reef. A truly magical experience!"

Speaking about the Hatteras North Carolina trip, diver **ATIL TOSUN** says, "The July 18 to 23 fundraiser to benefit the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation is a great example of Diving For a Cause's philanthropic mission: in this case focusing on one foundation devoted to a specific disease. Diving for a Cause makes awareness a two-way street. Freedivers highlight spearfishing to an audience that may not know the physical endurance, focused attitude, and spirit required to do the sport. By choosing a disease specific foundation, DFAC brings the attention of freedivers to the physical endurance, focused attitude and spirit required to live with that disease. DFAC selected the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation for its July, 2011 event, and the American Cancer Society for its August event, after being inspired by individuals with a specific connection to freediving and spearfishing."

If you are looking for a fun week's spearfishing, with a dual purpose, please take a look at the possibilities on the DFAC web page— [www.divingforacause.org](http://www.divingforacause.org). The difference you make in the lives of others, will enrich your own. **PAU**

The image is a vertical rectangular frame with a dark blue background. It contains two divers. The first diver, in the upper half, is wearing a dark wetsuit and a helmet, and is ascending towards the top left. The second diver, in the lower half, is wearing a dark wetsuit with a red recovery vest and is struggling, surrounded by a large cloud of white bubbles. Text is overlaid on the image in a yellow, bold, sans-serif font.

**Return to  
the surface  
one way -**

**or the  
other...**

**The Freedivers Recovery Vest**

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