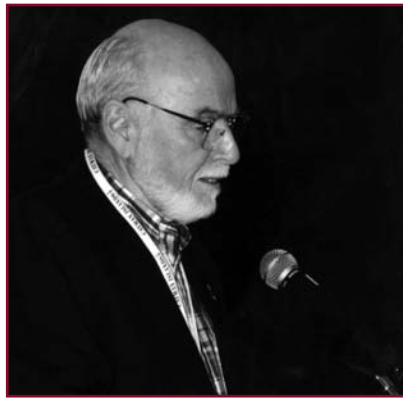


## C. Ben Davis, NAUI 101L 1925 - 2014

By Bob Belcher, NAUI 3836



Ben Davis at the NAUI Hall of Honor Ceremony in 2000.

*I had the pleasure of interviewing Ben in the fall of 2013 focusing mainly on his outstanding role in developing safe recreational scuba diving practices and quality diving instruction.*

Clark Bain “Ben” Davis, NAUI 101L, passed away at his home on July 21, 2014, in his 89th year. His leadership over the years points to his very significant role in the promotion of safe diving instruction over seven decades—from the 1950s up to the time of his death. Ben was there at the beginning of the establishment of recreational diving organizations in North America.

Born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Ben grew up in Canada in northern Ontario and then Toronto. His Canadian mother was married to an American who worked in the lumber and paper industry. During the Second World War Ben was infantry trained and then transferred into the Royal Canadian Engineers. He was always known to “tell it like it is,” and his outspoken nature ruffled a few feathers in the Canadian military. After the war he earned his civil engineering degree through the University of Toronto and worked for a few different engineering companies over his professional career. After proposing in a red cedar strip canoe, Ben married the love his

life, Patricia, in 1956. They had three children and four grandchildren. Both Ben and Pat loved the outdoors and spending time at their cottage in the Kawartha area with family and friends.

In the late 1940s and early '50s, sport scuba diving was a very informally organized activity. Enthusiasts gathered up any equipment they could from military surplus stores. Some people were making their own gear. Ben's first dives were in 1945 using “liberated equipment and other homemade gear” (Ben's words). Some enthusiasts were ordering equipment through mail-order catalogues. Various individuals were teaching scuba diving in city pools. Ben Davis himself, on a trip to the U.S. in 1948, brought back a tank, a regulator, and a dry suit to go along with the fins and mask he already had.

Tom Rutherford operated a sports store in Toronto that catered to divers in the early '50s and the store became a bit of a hangout for divers. At the shop Ben met George Burt, Steve Kozak, and other local pioneers of the sport. (George was later certified as NAUI 102 and Steve as NAUI 104). They soon realized the need to form a dive club. They established the Underwater Club of Canada with the general purpose of offering safe diving instruction, organization of dives, and the promotion of the sport. Ian Cameron was the first president of the newly formed club and Ben was the vice president. In the following years Ben Davis was president of the club for eight years (1953-61), and George Burt followed Ben as president for an eight-year term as well. Popular dive locations in Ontario included Moore Falls, Lake Ontario around the destroyer HMCS *Haida* at dock in Toronto, Bala, and Lake Simcoe.

Ben told me the story of being contacted in 1954 by the Naval Commander of the HMCS *York*. It seems they needed some divers to take

part in a war games activity since they didn't have any divers of their own. Despite the stormy weather and raging river, Ben and his buddies (the “bad guys”) successfully participated in a mock night expedition to “blow up” a bridge and do serious damage to the “good guys.”

A few years later a group of representatives from several dive clubs in Ontario met to discuss forming a provincial organization. Ben remembered Etobicoke, Trenton, Base Borden, Scarborough, British Sub-Aqua, as well as the U/W Club of Canada as being among those present. This meeting resulted in the formation of the Ontario Underwater Council (OUC) in 1958. Commander Ken Grant from Base Borden was the first president of the OUC. Ben Davis was the second president, serving for two years (1959-61). The OUC remains today as a driving force in the promotion of safe diving in Ontario and Canada, bringing together clubs, agencies, and commercial diving interests. Ben remembered a delay in the design of the original OUC crest in 1964 because he had to wait for Lester Pearson, then Canada's prime minister, to gain approval for the new Canadian flag.

Similarly, C. Ben represented the OUC at a meeting in Boston in 1959 where the Underwater Society of America was formed. Ben became vice president and director of safety for the society, a position he held for ten years! One of his projects was to develop and implement the exact specifications for the North American divers' flag—the red square with the white diagonal. Ben was very protective of that design and was quite annoyed whenever he saw the divers' flag depicted differently, as a rectangle for instance. He negotiated with the U.S. and Canadian Coast Guard for its adoption as the “diver down” flag in North America.



Ben was widely published on diving incidents, accidents, and safe diving practices. Indeed, he was so involved in diving that he was presented with the NOGI Award for Distinguished Service by The Academy of Underwater Arts & Sciences in 1961, the second year it was awarded. Ben said he was “flooded” to win this award. The chair of the selection committee told him, “Everywhere we looked, your name was there.” This award went to Jacques-Yves Cousteau in 1966. For a complete list of NOGI winners go to: [http://www.auas-nogi.org/nogi\\_recipients.html](http://www.auas-nogi.org/nogi_recipients.html). It is a virtual list of “who’s who” in diving.

But Ben’s career in diving organizations was just getting started. In 1961 he was asked by Herb Ingram to be on the board of a newly formed diving instruction agency to be called the National Association of Underwater Instructors (NAUI) based in California. Ben said, in his usual frank manner, “Why would I do that?” He was working full time and had three young children. In the end Ben agreed to serve and later was president of NAUI (1968-71). The first NAUI Instructor course was held in Houston in 1960; and the second, at Hart House at the University of Toronto in 1961 under the leadership of Ben Davis, who was course director, presenter and a candidate all at the same time. Successful completion of the course granted a joint OUC/NAUI Instructor certification because, as Ben candidly said, “we didn’t know how long NAUI was going to last.” Those first Instructor courses were quite militaristic in nature. “We did things you wouldn’t think of doing now. We had candidates breathe off a tank without a regulator. We had Hank Halliday and Reid Tussey demonstrate direct or shuttle breathing with one of them weighted and walking the length of the pool on the bottom while the other provided breaths of air [mouth-to-mouth rescue breathing] from the surface.” NAUI became the training arm of the U/W Society of America. A detailed history of NAUI by Al Tillman NAUI # 1 and his son Thomas is available on the NAUI website.

I am sure that the 1961 NAUI Instructor Certification Course inspired some members of the newly formed Hart House Underwater Club (HHUC) to seek out Ben Davis to teach a scuba certification course at the University in the fall of 1963. That course spawned a very long and successful association between NAUI and the HHUC that continues to this day after fifty-one years! The club, since its inception, was very fortunate to have had the benefit of the expertise of one of the most respected Instructors in the sport and annually presents an award in his name.

Ben became the first president of the Association of Canadian Underwater Councils (ACUC) on its formation at a meeting in Winnipeg in 1964. He recalled strong representation from both coasts as well as other provinces. He encountered some regional bickering that he countered with, “What’s wrong with you people? We all put our wetsuits on the same way.” The group also was reluctant to turn over the leadership of ACUC to the strong OUC contingent, but when no one volunteered to do it, Ben was elected as the first president of ACUC (1964-68). In his usual fashion Ben said, “I’ll do it for two years, then some one else will have to take over.” But he ended up in the position for four years.

In 1971 NAUI Canada was formed to foster NAUI in Canada with a number of advantages of incorporation. Ben was the first president of NAUI Canada (1971-72) with Steve and Rosemary Kozak were general manager and office manager respectively. Under Ben’s guidance NAUI blossomed to become the dominant diving instructional agency in Canada at that time. NAUI Canada operated with very close ties to its roots in California until the mid ’90s when an economic downturn made NAUI Canada no longer viable, and NAUI reorganized. After stepping down as president, Ben served as chair of the Ethics Committee for NAUI Canada, as a course director of several NAUI Instructor Training Courses and on staff for many others. He also was very active in entry-level scuba diver courses teaching three or four

courses every year for a dive shop he helped to found with Todd Shannon Sr., NAUI 510—Aqua-Systems in Mississauga, Ontario. At York University he taught with Lawrence Beagan, NAUI 6226, and Britton Mockridge, NAUI 2036. In the 1990s, Ben was instrumental in founding the Adapted Scuba Association in Canada and opening opportunities for people with disabilities to enjoy diving.

In addition to the NOGI, other awards presented to Ben Davis included recognition from: The Underwater Club of Canada, The Etobicoke Underwater Club, The Province of Ontario – Achievement in Fitness and Amateur Sport, The Federal Government of Canada’s Centennial Medal for Service to the Nation, The Hart House Underwater Club, The NAUI Canada Medal, The Canadian Boating Federation, and NAUI’s Outstanding Service Award and Continuing Service Award. *[Ben will receive NAUI’s Lifetime Achievement Award at this year’s DEMA Show in Las Vegas. — Editor]*

More recently C. Ben Davis was inducted into the inaugural class of the NAUI’s Hall of Honor (2000). In 2002, he was presented with the HHUC Cornerstone Award for his role in the founding and leadership contributions with the club for decades. In 2010, Ben participated in the HHUC NAUI AI/Divemaster Course session on the legal aspects of diving.

It is almost impossible to do justice to the remarkable diving leadership career of Ben Davis in a short article such as this. He was instrumental in helping to establish the guiding principles of NAUI. He was a first-class guy with unquestionable ethics and a dynamic leader. His friendly smile and piercing eyes kept everyone involved accountable and on task. He had the remarkable ability to attract and keep good people around to help him do what he wanted to accomplish. Then he would step aside and let others take over. C. Ben has been a very positive influence on many divers, instructors and diving organizations since the introduction of scuba diving to North America. Thanks, Ben! The diving community is forever indebted to you.