

# THE LITTLE SHIP IN THE DESERT

## THE ADVENTURES OF LAUNCHING A SEA SCOUTS SHIP



**AS YOUR DIVING SKILLS IMPROVE** and your adventures continue to mount up, you might start to think about how you can share your experiences with others. This is my story of how I found added enjoyment to an already fulfilling career in diving. Along the way, I will share with you how you can give back to the sport you love and enhance the lives of others.

Seven years ago, our son Jona needed a parent to lead his Cub Scout den. For some reason, no other parents stepped up. However, Jona really wanted to continue in scouting. He enjoyed the activities and was beginning to like camping. What also happened was he was starting to show signs of leadership — a quality we all love to see in children. Having never been involved in a Cub Scout pack, with some reluctance — and without knowing what I was getting myself into — I became leader of the pack.

**BY CAPTAIN KATHY WEYDIG**





## BSA BASICS

Boy Scouts of America (BSA) is one of the oldest and most respected organized youth programs. In the United States, there are more than 2.5 million children with an additional 1 million adults who are actively involved in scouting and leadership activities. And while that is impressive in and of itself, what is more impressive is the organizational process and tools the BSA makes available to both leaders and scouts. My first step was to take advantage of the BSA's online learning system by completing the first level of training entitled "This is Scouting."

What better way to learn about how to lead a scout den than to first find

out about the organization? When most people think about scouting they think, Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts and the girls who sell cookies, Girl Scouts. And, while Girl Scouts are not part of BSA, there are many co-ed programs within the BSA.

BSA consists of five distinct divisions, Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, Venturing, Sea Scouts and Exploring. What immediately snagged my attention was Sea Scouts, whose "packs" are actually called Sea Scouts Ships. Having been on and in the water for my entire life, this felt like something to look at. My maritime and scuba resume was well suited for being a leader in this arena. I'm a water person. I don't know a whole lot about pitching

a tent and hiking in the dirt, but I do know about raising a sail, navigating seas, and exploring reefs and shipwrecks. As a dive professional, a boat captain and a mom I said to myself, "If I must do this scouting thing, I should at least be running a Sea Scout Ship." Perhaps this would be the program where I could make the most significant impact: teaching youth to love the sea, boats, sailing and scuba.

We currently live in Lake Havasu City, Arizona, smack in the middle of the desert. The idea of starting up a Sea Scout Ship in the middle of the desert could have been a daunting task but I've never been big on taking "no" for an answer. So, the adventure began to start the little ship in the desert.



The author Capt. Kathy Weydig, fifth from left, with her Sea Scouts in Lake Havasu, AZ.



Few big projects ever happen overnight. Jona still wanted to be a Cub Scout, that den still needed a leader and I needed to learn the system. So, for the next year, I ran the Cub Scout den and worked my way through the scouting system to understand the BSA way of doing things and to strategize how to create a Sea Scout Ship. The desert is an odd place to imagine a Sea Scout ship but, with a little ingenuity, inspiration and perspiration, the quest was underway.

On the western border of the Arizona desert, we have almost 60 miles (97 km) of the Colorado River, including Lake Havasu. Despite being surrounded by the Mohave Desert, this particular area is a water haven.

There is a huge boating community that includes jet skis, pontoon boats, motorboats, sailboats and super-fast race boats. This region hosts boating activities and events twelve months of the year. In the summer, the community of fast boats outranks most places in the nation. For the winter, the soft breezes make it a perfect place for sailing. Top the water off with more than 120 miles (193 km) of possible campgrounds, it's an ideal place to set up a Sea Scout Ship.

As I surveyed many of the scout parents, I found very few had taken their kids to the lake for more than a boat ride now and then. Even fewer had a clear understanding of boating safety, skills or navigation. Almost none had

entertained the idea of getting under the water, either. Yet, they all seemed to lean in and get interested whenever I would talk about boating and diving. The need was there, the lake is here and this would give me a great opportunity to provide opportunities to those who could benefit from the mission of Sea Scouts of being in, on and under the water.

Creating programs for adults is easy. We have been doing that for decades. Teaching diving, organizing conferences and speaking on the lecture circuit on every topic from boating safety, diving and dive medicine. But creating a fun-filled, educational and safe program for children and teens is a whole different animal. One



has to take into consideration socioeconomic factors, cultural differences, religious affiliations, educational levels and learning abilities. Add a range of maturity levels and quickly the challenges compound. But this is where BSA became my savior. All of these challenges had been addressed through more than 100 years of experience. There was no need to reinvent this wheel. I just needed to have the willingness to learn and the dedication to give it my time and energy.

Because Sea Scout Ships are traditionally based in nautical communities, I needed to find the successful leaders and learn from them. I started reaching out via Facebook and found more than 50 active pages for ships, with many in nearby California. I reached out and everyone was not only accommodating, but they were excited that we would be creating the “Little Ship in the Desert.” Between getting help from the Sea Scout National Headquarters in Texas, our local Council in Las Vegas and my new-

found California Sea Scout friends, I knew I could get this going. With their guidance, I learned the basics needed to have enough confidence to start the ship.

### LAUNCHING THE SSS HEATWAVE 450

When starting a ship from scratch, the most difficult challenges are organizational, including selecting uniforms, obtaining vessels, equipment and flags. Plus, there are schedules, insurance, other necessary adult leadership, trips and activities. The mission was crystal clear: to teach these kids about the water and to become leaders. Is there anything else more important for securing their futures? This was what I was supposed to be doing now.

Our first group of scouts was a mismatch of young adults — three girls and two boys. The dynamics were quite impressive as they each came from different backgrounds. As scouting is about developing leaders, my job

as the skipper is not to tell them what to do — but to show them how they can do it. The big questions for the ship would be: how do we accomplish our goals promptly, how do they choose a leader, how much do they know and where do you start with a new ship? While that is a lot to ask the first day, sometimes a little fun activity can help uncover the answers. Knot tying is always the icebreaking event. Scouts love to show off their knot-tying abilities. And what is interesting is when one kid does not know how, the others quickly show them. From this one exercise, we were able to identify potential leadership abilities. It can be quite rewarding. You’ve probably heard the old adage, “If you don’t know how to tie a knot, tie a lot of them.” Our Sea Scouts would say, “If you don’t know how to tie a knot, I’ll teach you how.”

We named our ship SSS *Heatwave 450*. Lake Havasu sits at an elevation of 450 feet (137 m) above sea level and is one of the hottest places in the country. With summer tem-

Scuba diving can be a primary focus of a BSA Sea Scouts program.

## How to Start a Sea Scout Scuba Ship

Starting a Sea Scout Scuba Ship is a relatively easy process. The ship will need a sponsoring charter organization, which can be a dive shop, dive club, yacht club or swim club. The group needs to register with the Boy Scouts of America and needs at least two committed adults and at least five youths. It would be beneficial to contact the local Boy Scout Council and meet with the District Executive who can help support the Ship’s efforts. The costs are nominal for both the charter and individual scout fees. Keep in mind that like any organization, the ship will need to raise funds to support their mission. To get started, visit [seascout.org](http://seascout.org).



## About Sea Scouts

For over 100 years, Sea Scouts has promoted better citizenship and improved members' boating skills through instruction and practice in awater safety, boating skills, outdoor, social, service experiences and knowledge of our maritime heritage. Sea Scout units are called ships and are established all across the country on oceans, bays, rivers and lakes. Sea Scouts is a co-ed program for youth ages 14-21. To learn more, visit [seascout.org](http://seascout.org).



Sea Scouts participate in a variety of community-service projects, including beach and underwater cleanups.

peratures topping 125 degrees Fahrenheit (52 degrees Celsius), "Heat-wave" was an appropriate moniker. The scouts created the name and designed the logo to incorporate our Little Ship in the Desert.

We navigated some choppy waters during our first year as SSS *Heatwave* 450. The makeup of our scouts changed: the boys moved on to other activities and the girls brought in some of their friends, leaving us with an all-girl ship.

Water activities were not on many of these girls' radar, but they were up to the challenge of the unknown. Most were not good swimmers and admitted to being a bit afraid of the water. They had no idea what was in the water or what it was about other than it being pretty. To help them have a better understanding of our water resources, I challenged them to work on service projects with the Bureau of Land Management. These projects included water clarity studies, helping with the underwater fish habitat and tree planting programs. And they each assisted with the many fishing tournaments hosted each year. Each of the girls carried live, flopping bass to awaiting release boats during fishing competitions. Their fear of the water, and what was in it, quickly faded.

Our metaphorical ship needed actual boats for practicing real-life boating skills. Our friends and community were incredibly generous in our first year. People from all over the area donated most of the equipment we have. It was amazing how our Little Ship in the Desert has acquired a fleet of vessels, including two small powerboats, two sailboats, a few Sunfish, kayaks, rowboats and more. We also received safety equipment, radios and lots of lines! All

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Sea Scouts are required to complete boating safety courses, first aid and boat handling training.

Now, the SSS *Heatwave* is completing its fifth year. More than twenty kids have passed through the ship with a few now off to college. The gender mix of the ship has changed from first starting off as a mixed ship, to an all-female ship, to a 50/50 mix, to our current nearly all-male crew. Our ship is an organic program that changes with the times and the population. The hierarchy has developed to where the kids, for the most part, run the entire operation. My role as Skipper has reached the level all Skippers would like to have: I oversee the ship and help the kids develop into leaders.

It took a few years to get the procedures in place, to develop the training needed for each scout to advance to a new level of achievement. The program uses classic nautical seaman ranks including, Apprentice, Ordinary, Able and Quartermaster. As scouts earn each rank award they are not only developing into competent sailors, they are developing their leadership skills. The end game is the game of life and the achievement of Quartermaster. Many people are familiar with the Eagle Scout rank in Boy Scouts — it is highly respected and the quality of many of our nation's leaders. A Quartermaster is the highest award for a Sea Scout and represents a challenge that, when met, has a positive lifelong effect on a person. In addition to having gone through significant training in earlier ranks, it truly represents the ideals of scouting and leadership. A Quartermaster must complete a major service project and also oversee a cruise on which they take command of a crew and vessel with all of the requisite pomp, circumstance and drills. From a military perspective, when a Quartermaster chooses to enter the service, they enter an E-3 grade instead of E-1. And they do so with significant leadership experience.

## BECOMING A SCUBA SHIP

Our Little Ship in the Desert has made great strides in achieving multiple rank levels. As new kids come in, the others help them get up to speed quickly. Last year, feeling that everyone was well trained in the basics, we finally were able to make my vision a reality. We introduced our scouts to scuba diving. With the help of our local dive center, Scuba Training and Technology, Inc., the Lake Havasu Divers Association, our friends at Scuba Diving International (SDI) and a West Marine Blue Futures Grant, we were able to offer a low cost, low barrier to entry to the SDI Open Water Scuba Course. Eight Sea Scouts earned the Open Water Diver certification and many are now diving on a regular basis. Our focus is now turning to underwater environmental projects.

SSS *Heatwave 450* is growing. It has taken five years to get where it is but every step is rewarding. The ship meets twice a month for official activities plus the kids are diving, sometimes once a week, with our sponsoring dive shop. Future activities include dive and sail travel to California's Catalina and Anacapa Islands, as well as the BSA Sea Base in the Florida Keys. Our planet is covered in water and our scouts are excited about exploring it all.

While diving in Lake Havasu might not be as glamorous as a trip to the Florida Keys or California's Catalina Island, we have many exciting things to do and see both above and below the water. The Sea Scouts have fun diving events to participate in, such as underwater pumpkin carving, an Easter egg hunt, the annual underwater turkey dive and, our famed, frozen fin dive on New Year's Day. Also, they are learning about ecology and conservation by helping with underwater cleanups, both as topside and underwater support. Within the BSA, the Sea Scouts program can be established as a Sea Scout Scuba Ship



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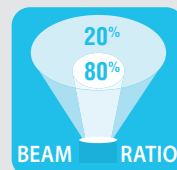


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where the focus can start out with scuba as its primary mission.

As divers, I believe it is our responsibility to share our love of the ocean, lakes and streams and to teach our youth that every body of water is essential. By sharing our love of scuba diving, we can open up a whole new world to kids, their families and their friends — we can pass our enthusiasm on to the next generation. Becoming a Sea Scout Skipper of the Little Ship in the Desert is my way of doing this and I can honestly say it's worth the time and energy. Like so many others who volunteer, whether it's with marine conservation or coral reef restoration or helping veterans learn to dive, I feel that I get more than I give. For me, there's nothing like seeing a scuba diving scout's excitement after a dive. I hope my story will encourage you to consider becoming a Sea Scout volunteer or finding some other way to share your love of diving.

## Scouting Resources

The following resources offer information about scuba-themed scouting programs:

**Sea Scouts:** [seascout.org](http://seascout.org)

**Boy Scouts of America:**  
[scouting.org/outdoor-programs/aquatics/scuba-bsa/](http://scouting.org/outdoor-programs/aquatics/scuba-bsa/)

**Boy Scouts of America (BSA)**

**Seabase:** [bsaseabase.org](http://bsaseabase.org)

**Scuba Diving International (SDI) :** [tdisdi.com/boy-scouts-team-up-with-sdi](http://tdisdi.com/boy-scouts-team-up-with-sdi)

## Additional Resources

The following resources offer scuba-related programs aimed at kids and families:

**Kids Sea Camp:** [familydivers.com](http://familydivers.com)

**Reef Environmental Education Foundation:** [reef.org](http://reef.org)

**Oceans for Youth:**  
[oceansforyouth.org](http://oceansforyouth.org)

**NAUI Green Diver:**  
[nauigreendiver.org](http://nauigreendiver.org)