



With Great Sadness

It is with the greatest sadness that I inform you of the passing of the industry's great friend and true diving pioneer, Bob Kirby, who passed away June 1, at his home in California.

Bob's diving career spanned seven decades and his achievements in both diving and aviation earned him lasting international recognition.

Bob left the US Navy in the 1950's to become a California abalone diver. He quickly used his skills as a remarkable metalsmith to design a mixed - gas recirculating diving helmet with a small team of colleagues at Associated Divers. Bob's design of helmet was a major factor in the successful expansion of deep water mixed gas diving that flourished in Santa Barbara, California, in the early 1960's, and gradually spread around the globe.

In 1965 Bob joined forces with Bev Morgan, and created the Kirby Morgan company that was to revolutionize the equipment of military and commercial diving.

Bob and Bev designed and created modern

lightweight fiberglass helmets that replaced the traditional copper and brass helmets that had been the diving industry standard for over century. It is estimated that their company Kirby Morgan Diving Systems International now has a more that 80% market share of the global surface supplied diving equipment market. Some estimates are even higher.

In addition to his contributions to diving equipment development, Bob also donated his time and considerable expertise in educating the younger divers who he taught at the Marine Diving Technology Center at Santa Barbara City College, and also at specialist traditional diving equipment courses for the Historical Diving Society USA (HDSUSA). As a Director of HDSUSA Bob was also instrumental in developing the inaugural diving exhibits at Santa Barbara Maritime Museum, which he and his wife Claudia were valued members of.

His friend, film director James Cameron, hired Bob to develop and build the unique helmets for his blockbuster film *The Abyss*, and Bob later took the time to record much of his career in his book *Hard Hat Divers Wear Dresses*. More recently his contributions to helmet design have been featured in the Kirby

Morgan You Tube Video series Diving Into The Past.

Bob's career achievements were recognized with the HDSUSA Diving Pioneer Award, the Academy of Underwater Arts & Sciences NOGI Award, and induction in to the Commercial Diving Hall of Fame.

Those of us fortunate enough to have been befriended or mentored by Bob were blessed with the good fortune of time spent with an honorable, ethical, and immensely talented diver and educator, whose name will live on as long as there are professional divers working in all the worlds oceans and waterways.

President Kennedy once said "That one man can make a difference, And everyman should try."

Bob was one of those Americans who did both, and every member of the international diving industry owes him sincere thanks for that.

He will be missed by many.

Fair winds and following seas old friend.

— Leslie Leaney

Photo by Bev Morgan
