

# Changing of the guard at the WSORC

By Rodger Mehrer and Loretta Potts; photos by Sue Beerman



To all our WSORC supporters, we are excited to announce that there are some significant changes going on at WSORC.

Regrettably, our fearless leader, Kelly Schratwieser, has resigned in order to pursue advanced dive training. During Kelly's tenure she instituted the school program allowing WSORC interns to create and provide weekly presentations at the local schools to increase awareness of Marine Ecology for the local school children along with a number of other projects.

All of us at WSORC wish Kelly the best and we will miss her terribly. The new WSORC team is committed to continuing her programs and build on her past efforts.

Taking over the helm in this interim period are Dr. Loretta Potts, her husband, Rodger Mehrer and Dr. Robert Davis (who has joined the staff as our International Director).



Dr. Potts is a Veterinarian with a Masters degree in Biology. Her interest in Whale Sharks began six years ago while assisting Dr. Alex Antoniou of the Shark Research Institute (SRI). She was so charmed by the gentle giant and the island of Utila, that she and her husband have been returning to the island ever since. "Dr. Loretta" and "Mr. Rodger" have built a home on the island and are now permanent residents here.

When not working in their "donation only" veterinary clinic, both Loretta and Rodger have been volunteered in the WSORC office.

Dr. Loretta completed her Dive Master program and Whale Shark Specialty Course, giving her the knowledge and experience to lead locals and tourists on the boats for Eco Tours so they can experience once in a lifetime encounters

with whale sharks, dolphin, Manta Rays and Sperm whales. This experience for tourists adds to the awareness of preserving the species and teaches them the correct manner in which to encounter the "gentle giants" without harming or harassing them. Under her direction Loretta will continue the work already in place and add a new dimension to the already exciting work being done at WSORC.

Rodger Mehrer retired after a 30 year career in Business development and management, and has also become enchanted by the whale sharks of Utila. Since moving to Utila he has completed his Dive Master, Whale Shark Specialty Course, and Assistant Instructor Courses and is currently in the Instructor program at Bay Islands College of Diving.

His vision for WSORC is also to continue awareness and preservation of Whale Sharks, our reefs and all species that call Utila home. He has been leading the Eco Tours for some time now and is excited about continuing the Whale Shark tissue sampling and especially, the photo ID that is done through Eco Ocean. This "finger printing" will allow us even more information on the migratory patterns of this illusive creature.

Dr. Robert Davis joins WSORC as its Director of International Development. He has been diving for 40 years with 4500 logged dives, 600 in the Bay Islands. He spent time in the Navy after graduation from college as a UDT(S) officer. He has been a college professor and administrator for 20 years and brings that wealth of knowledge to WSORC.

Dr. Robert Davis and many other volunteers that live here on Utila, along with Loretta and Rodger, will be working diligently to continue the dream that WSORC's founder, Jim Engel, had envisioned. All of us at WSORC are very excited and driven to see Jim's dream stay alive. Please help support our efforts. We can assure everyone involved with WSORC, that it is very much alive and we are very excited about the future.

In conjunction with the already existing programs offered through WSORC we will be working to expand the operation through a variety of new programs and offerings.

Kisty, through her never-ending generosity has committed to providing the equipment to permit local school children



to become actively involved with the sea life and reefs that surround their island home. The vast majority of these children have never been on a boat, snorkeled on the reefs or seen a whale shark! Our goal is to advance their knowledge and instill conservation into their way of life.

It is in these children that we need to increase awareness and through them, reach the adult population of Utila.

Second, we are enlisting help from part-time and full-time Ex-Patriots who now call Utila 'Home' to expand the ranks of volunteers available to WSORC.

Third, PADI's "Project AWARE" program will become a significant part of our efforts to educate Utila's local children.

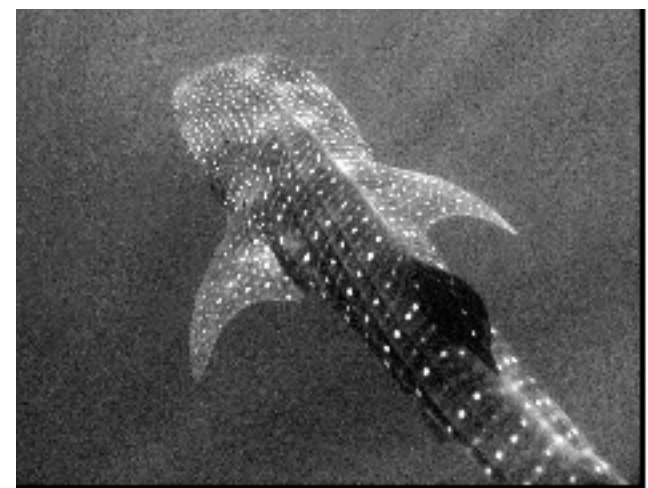
Fourth, "Dr. Rob" will be working from his home base in San Diego, California to encourage universities and colleges to sponsor rotational internships at WSORC.

Fifth, we will increase our emphasis of photo ID and tissue sampling as a means to track these elusive creatures. Although physical tagging is still an option, we believe less invasive options are where our efforts should primarily be focused.

These are just a few examples of what we are striving for in WSORC's near future. As always, we invite anyone with suggestions or comments to email us or come on down and lend a hand. We are open to any and all ideas to make WSORC better than ever.

In closing we are excited to announce that the "Gentle Giant" is back for the season! We had our first encounter on September 8th and got this great picture taken by Sue Beerman, our volunteer photographer. The Whale Shark was 5 to 6 meters. It appeared to be a female but may have been an immature male.

COMMENTS OR SUGGESTIONS? Please send to: Loretta@wsorc.com or Rodger@wsorc.com



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### Happy 1st Birthday Zeb Lucas Herrera 10th September



Now that is a fro!

## Road works...ouch!

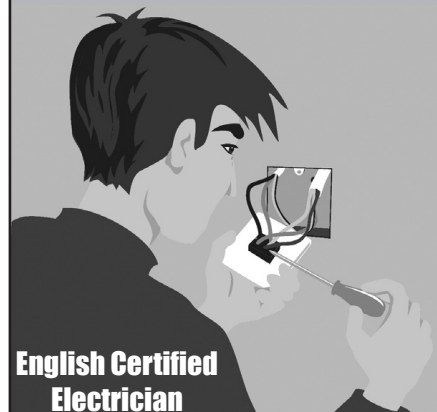
Finally Utila is getting a sanitation system, which should go a long way towards improving the quality of water in the Bay. Bacteria levels are being monitored and are showing an increase in contamination to the point where our waters could be no longer safe for our children to swim in the near future. The new system will feature a network of gray water lines that are now being installed throughout East Harbour. These lines will carry the gray water from septic tanks that will be located throughout town to a sewage treatment plant to be located at the Municipal Dump. The septic tanks will be emptied as required and the raw sewage will be taken to the plant for treatment.

The new pipes are being laid now. Hopefully the Sewage Treatment Plant works better than the engineers in charge of the installation and their workers. Sandy Bay has been in a state of rubble, mud and water for weeks and businesses are suffering. Countryside has also been inaccessible with gaping holes and mud piles left unattended for over a week. There have also been many complaints about the rude, if not lewd, behavior by the workers hired to do the work. These workers must realize that they are working for the Community and should be treating our people and businesses with respect and help bring this crucial project to completion with a minimal amount of frustration.

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