



Hugh Parkey Foundation Launched to Instill Marine Awareness in Belize's Youth

3 February 2003

The Hugh Parkey Foundation for Marine Awareness & Education, a non-profit organization designed to create a better understanding and appreciation of our unique underwater environment, was launched today in Belize City. The Foundation will focus its efforts on exposing nearly 61,000 students

enrolled in primary and secondary schools to the fascinating watery world at their doorstep.

The Foundation will operate independently in Belize and has aligned itself with the prestigious Oceans for Youth Foundation, based in the United States. Oceans for Youth has committed to providing numerous documentary video clips co-produced with world-renowned oceanographer, Jean-Michele Cousteau.

The Foundation will be responsible for providing these videos with accompanying study guides to be implemented within the school system and will sponsor field trips to enhance the learning experience. "Hugh was so good at what he did because his passion for the underwater experience was unwavering. He truly enjoyed every single underwater encounter. He had an uncanny ability to make people feel at ease and his ability to share what he loved with others was a remarkable gift. It is important to us to carry on this legacy by sharing the marine environment with the young people of Belize. If we are successful in giving only a small number of children the opportunity to experience and appreciate the marine world the way Hugh did, Belize will truly benefit." – Teresa Parkey.

Belize is bordered by the world's second longest Barrier Reef, running 190 stunning miles from North to South. The Reef provides numerous economic and recreational opportunities in Belize. Understanding this unique and fragile ecosystem is vital for its continued survival.

The Hugh Parkey Foundation was named posthumously to celebrate the life of Hugh Parkey, a well loved and respected citizen of the sea. Hugh's passion for the underwater world was spawned in the Pacific, where he became a certified diver in 1971. His avocation became his vocation, encompassing many facets of the dive industry- first as a commercial diver, then educator, instructor, dive shop owner and tour operator. Parkey helped develop an Associates Degree Program for Underwater Occupations at Santa Anna College in southern California.

He immigrated to Belize in 1985 as a partner in the live-aboard dive boat "La Strega", one of the first live aboard dive boats to ply these waters. Two years later, Parkey met his

future wife and partner, Teresa. The couple married and enjoyed long stints managing premier dive resorts at the Turneffe Atoll and Ambergris Caye.

Hugh Parkey's Belize Dive Connection opened in 1996 with long time friend and fellow instructor, Mike Burke. Hugh believed Belize City was the perfect location to base yourself for both diving and exploring Belize's terrestrial wonders. Hugh is credited with pioneering the dive trade in Belize City, which has since flourished with the arrival of cruise ship visitors.

In 1993, Hugh was a founding recipient of the prestigious "Platinum Pro Award" for his contributions to diving and for completing in excess of 5000 dives. He certified thousands of divers in his long career. His philosophy about diving was simple – have fun, enjoy what you're doing and above all, do it safely. His love and enthusiasm of the sport overflowed and he is credited with igniting a lifelong interest in the undersea world in the many people he came into contact with. "Hugh Parkey was the perfect host, a professional diver and an expert captain. It is my sincere wish, that through the Hugh Parkey Foundation, he will be remembered fondly by the thousands of divers whose lives were touched by his knowledge, grace and hospitality" – Rick Frehsee, Sport Dive Magazine.

Hugh was in the midst of opening his second dive shop at a new resort owned by filmmaker Francis Ford Coppola, when tragedy struck. In July of 2002, at 56 years old, Parkey was felled by a heart attack after a dive in Cancun. He is survived by his wife, two sons and thousands of divers the world over. Friends, family and business associates flocked to Belize to pay their respects and bid farewell to a remarkable man. His kindness endeared him to many. Hugh Parkey was a true gentleman.

It is hoped, that though the people whose lives were touched by Hugh, that we can continue to spread his love and understanding of the sea, from one generation to the next.

For more information or if you would like to participate in the work of the foundation, make donations for the development of study guides, implementation of the training materials in Belizean classrooms and to support the field trips and practical experience, please contact us at:

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