

Diving business booms

For Larry Bell, cold water means a quarter of a million dollars a year. He makes wet suits to protect scuba divers against the cold, and for him, cold means 300 feet underwater in the Arctic.

A marine biologist and veteran diver, Mr. Bell runs the only manufacturing plant in Tobermory, Narwhal Marine Products. "Business now is about \$250,000 a year," he says, "but it will triple in two years with exports to the European Common Market."

Narwhal manufactures custom-made wet suits for sports divers, but its big market is in heavy duty gear for commercial divers and Canadian Navy divers, who work in deeper, colder water. For oil rig divers in the Arctic, Narwhal makes dry suits — the diver wears thermal underwear inside the rubber shell — that keep a man warm at almost any depth. The zipper alone, the same kind used on astronauts' space suits, is worth \$170.

Inside the old wooden fishing station that houses his factory, Mr. Bell says, he has scored a breakthrough in cold water survival gear. It is a waterproof, pressureproof rubber suit to be worn by seamen exposed on deck, to replace today's lifejackets. "If you fall overboard in the North Atlantic in a lifejacket you freeze to death in eight minutes," he says. "A lifejacket just keeps the corpse floating."

The new Narwhal suit, he says, will keep a man warm and dry for 24 hours in mid-ocean. It inflates like a beachball. "Shipping unions and shipping lines are interested in it, and we start exporting it to the United States and Europe this fall. It will be useful on North Sea oil rigs."

Brenda Gilland, a Bell Canada accounting worker from Pickering who dives with her husband Gord at Tobermory, describes her interest in the sport. "It's stimulating when you're down there and every time you go there's something different to see."

Brian Main, a Willowdale insurance broker, compared the weightlessness of underwater movement to space flight. "Not until Pan-Am starts booking flights to the moon will the average person be able to experience weightlessness," he said.

Other diving spots

Divers also congregate at other places in Ontario than Tobermory. They dive at Midland, Parry Sound, Kingston (seeking relics of the War of 1812), in the Trent Canal system, around Sarnia, in lakes where the water is so dark they cannot see their own hands, even in abandoned quarries. Some dive under the ice in winter.

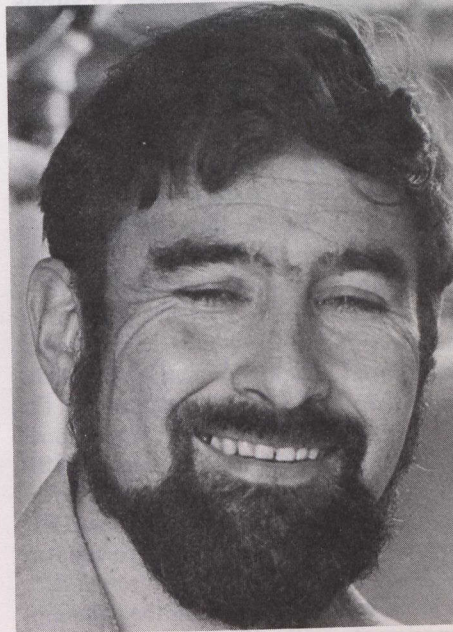
A lot of people, like Brian Main participate in scuba diving. The Underwater Council of Ontario, which represents 75 diving clubs, estimates the province has 15,000 active divers. They have their own magazine, special life insurance policies and underwater hockey tournaments. Council president Barry Adamson says 10,000 new divers are taught every year in Canada, about 5,000 of them in

Ontario. About 25 per cent of the new divers are women.

Diving doctor

The Underwater Council has hired its own full-time doctor to treat divers in Tobermory.

Dr. George Harpur's specialty is treat-



Diving specialist, Dr. George Harpur.

ment of divers' ills — from potentially fatal air embolisms to the bends, to pressure squeezes of tender tissues, burst eardrums and swimmers' ear (a minor

infection from prolonged exposure to dissolved micro-organisms).

Three years ago, the Ontario Government spent \$67,000 to install a whale-sized steel cylinder with a complex of compressors, gauges and valves to treat the weird pressure disorders that strike some of the area's huge scuba diving population. Diving fatalities have reduced dramatically.

The recompression chamber is basic medical hardware. Its presence in Tobermory reinforces the area's primacy as one of Canada's best known dive sites.

"There used to be two deaths a year from diving up around here," Dr. Harpur says. Since he began touring dive groups through the chamber and lecturing them on safety, three divers have died.

Dr. Harpur hopes to order an inquest into the recent deaths of two American divers if witnesses who have returned to their homes agree to testify.

"It would appear that the diving community still is not sufficiently aware of the danger. They still tend to regard depth as the macho thing."

The pair died while diving on the wrecked steamer *Forest City* which lies on a steep underwater slope ranging from 80 to 150 feet in depth. It is one of the deepest wrecks in the park.

Eight other divers were treated in the chamber last season, five for embolism and three for the bends. Both conditions result from the extra pressure to which a diver's body is subjected in water.

New York/Ontario transit system

Three large hydrofoils are expected to begin operation between Youngstown, New York, and Toronto, beginning next spring.

The 125-foot crafts, each with a 250-passenger capacity, are powered by twin 20-cycle diesel, 7,000-horsepower engines.

The 45-kilometre trip across Lake Ontario will take about 50 minutes. Top speed is estimated at 60 kilometres an hour.

The hydrofoils will be operated by Royal Hydrofoil Cruises, a Florida-based company which has received approval for the venture by Canadian authorities but is awaiting final approval by New York State officials.

Spokesmen for the hydrofoil firm said a one-way trip would cost \$15 for adults and \$10 for children.