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Diving with Sharks and General Counsel

Katelyn Polantz, Legal Times

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Even when lawyers go scuba diving, they're still lawyers.

The Underwater Bar Association, a lawyer group based in Florida that organizes dives and ocean-related volunteer work, took a handful of members in June far into the Gulf of Mexico for three days.

One evening, the lawyers crowded around the dinner table on the boat where they were staying. Alan Bennett, a solo intellectual property practitioner, fired up a Powerpoint presentation on his laptop. Seventy miles west of the Florida Keys, the lawyers earned a CLE credit.

"It's a group of lawyers who love to dive and be in the ocean and take care of the ocean," said Heather Weeter, executive vice president of "Dive Bar" and a Sedgwick associate. "I can tell you times where you have four or five of us on a boat between dives having a heated debate about the law."

[Founded three years ago](#), Dive Bar grew from 25 members to more than 100 now. For some, it's an alternative to golf, networking breakfasts and cocktail hours. For many like Weeter and David Black, a Berger Singerman deal lawyer, it's their passion.

"Isn't this mesmerizing? I just find it mesmerizing. We're snorkeling," David Black, a corporate lawyer at Berger Singerman, said, describing a Dive Bar trip he and his wife, also a lawyer, took last month.

The Blacks, Weeter and seven others went to Playa del Carmen, Mexico, for an eight-day, \$2,600-a-person trip. They swam with dozens of (docile) whale sharks and in natural underwater caves.

Besides the marvels the dive lawyers have seen, they've worked with organizations to protect the sea.

A hammerhead shark wore a satellite tracker the group bought until about six months ago, when it stopped responding. "Jaws," as they called the shark, either died or was eaten, Black said. The group also holds annual fundraisers and took part in an American Cancer Society Relay for Life by marathon diving instead of walking.

This year, they built out a coral reef in Florida by grafting coral they cut from a nursery into a barren patch underwater. It's now dubbed the Dive Bar Reef.

The members, however, have work at the back of their minds. The activities help personal injury lawyers get to know defense attorneys, or corporate lawyers mix with in-house counsels. Still, there are perks.

“Your cell phone cannot follow you underwater,” Weeter said.

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