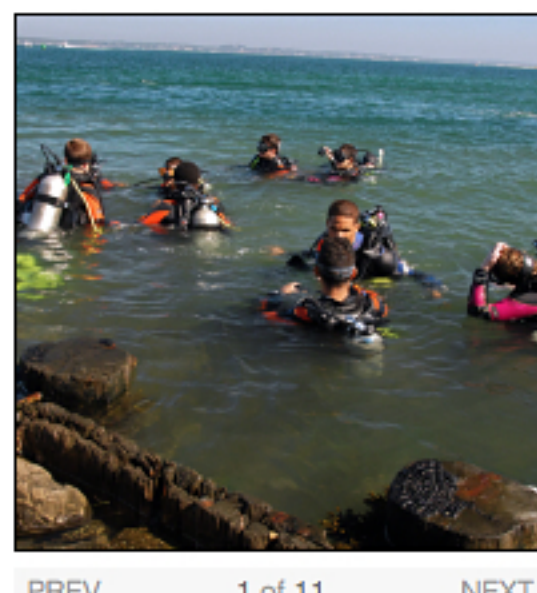


## LIDA Sponsors Harbor School Students On A Special Long Island Scuba Dive

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What a difference a year makes!

With Sunday, September 28 boasting a bright, sunny sky, warm summer-like weather and perfect diving conditions at Shinnecock Inlet's Ponquogue Bridge on Long Island, 25 students from the New York City Harbor School were able to enjoy an underwater experience each of them will long remember. This was the second consecutive year that the [Long Island Divers Association \(LIDA\)](#) has hosted this special group of student divers, and this year's conditions were vastly improved over last year's blustery winds and limited underwater visibility.



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Article and images by Michael Salvatoreza and Christopher Weaver ([Eco-Photo Explorers](#))

The [Urban Assembly New York Harbor School](#) is a public high school located on Governors Island In New York City. The school provides over 430 students, the majority of whom are classified as economically disadvantaged, with four years of college preparatory education, with a strong emphasis on maritime careers. Freshmen at the school can choose from six available career education paths, including such diverse and exciting disciplines as aquaculture, marine biology research, marine robotics and scientific diving. Tenth-grade scientific diving students are given the opportunity to train as certified SCUBA divers.

The school has been operating for 12 years. Historically, more than 70 percent of the students entering Harbor School are performing below grade level in either math or reading before starting at the school. In 2012 alone, 97 percent of Harbor School graduates were accepted to college, going on to top colleges and universities, including Cornell, Fordham, Middlebury, Penn State, SUNY Maritime and Syracuse. Many have also gone on to work in the maritime industry as licensed boat captains, SCUBA divers, ocean engineers, marine technicians or marine biologists.

While at the school, the student divers spend much of their underwater time exploring and studying the waters of New York Harbor and Governor's Island. The dive at Ponquogue Bridge, known as one of Long Island's premier dive locations, gave the students a chance to experience different diving conditions, with better visibility and more marine life than they typically encounter at Governor's Island.

*Local divers have been working dilligently to keep the old Ponquogue Bridge a site for future generations. New York Dive Community Rallies in Support of Favorite Site*

[Read more: New York Dive Community Rallies in Support of Favorite Site](#)

This year, the dive conditions exceeded everyone's expectations. Descending below the old Ponquogue Bridge at a carefully determined period of slack water, the student divers encountered clear water and a plethora of local marine life. Spider crabs, blue claw crabs, sea robins, flounder, and various types of shellfish captured their attention and were the subject of their excited chatter upon completing the dive. On this day, some delightful guests of the marine world even made an appearance. Each year, the warm water currents of the Gulf Stream sweep tropical fish from the southern waters of the Atlantic and Caribbean and bring them to our shores during the months of September and October. As a result, the Harbor School divers were surprised and thrilled to see butterflyfish, angelfish, and other tropical species right here in the waters of Long Island.

While the students were excited by the dive, the LIDA divers came away impressed with the enthusiasm, respect for the marine world and diving skills exhibited by the students. Each student carefully tended to his or her own equipment, and all students were quite adept in the sometimes-challenging conditions at the Ponquogue Bridge.

LIDA was instrumental in helping to provide transportation from the city for the students and arranged to have a full complement of experienced local divers on site to accompany the kids on their dives, helping them learn the dive site and ensuring their safety in the water. All the attendees were then treated to a full barbeque before breaking for the day.

The idea for this unique sponsorship came from a chance meeting between Barry Lipsky, President of LIDA, and Joe Gessert, a faculty member of the school, during a beach cleanup event on Coney Island shortly before Hurricane Sandy struck the area in 2012. After learning more about the mission of the Harbor School, Lipsky and LIDA launched this event in 2013. Building on the success of the first dive in 2013, LIDA and the Harbor School and have worked tirelessly to secure the location, date and logistics for a repeat in 2014.

The over-arching theme of this year's event was that of giving back. Many of the LIDA members who volunteered their time to provide guidance and mentoring to the students both in and out of the water possess the wisdom of experience garnered over years of diving these waters. The opportunity to give back to the students and to help inspire a new generation of divers was a powerful reason for scores of divers to join the event. Similarly, the Harbor School faculty encouraged the students to conduct a beach clean up after the barbeque, a meaningful way for the students themselves to give something back on this special day.

The sponsored dive is emblematic of the work of LIDA, a not-for-profit organization with a mission of advocating for divers interests on Long Island. Providing students from the Harbor School with access to one of the best dive sites in the entire region is the driving force behind this unique sponsorship event. Because of economic limitations, the students of the Harbor School rarely have access to diving outside of the waters close to New York City. The dive at the Ponquogue Bridge exposed them to a new and very different diving experience, which will help further fuel their interest in pursuing careers in the maritime industry.

And, as evidenced by the broad smiles and excited conversations after the dive, the Ponquogue Bridge dive with the Harbor School proved one more thing: giving back can, indeed, be fun!

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