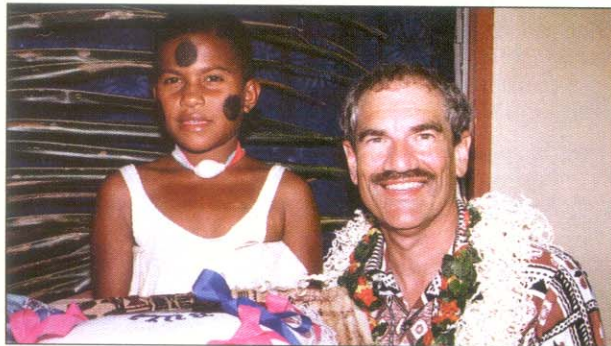


Saving Island Reefs

Duane Silverstein has worked with indigenous islanders to preserve more than 1.7 million acres of coral reefs and marine habitat worldwide.



ATU RISEA PHOTO

BY MICHELLE SLADE

Duane Silverstein, a DAN member since 1993, is the executive director of Seacology (www.seacology.org), the world's premier non-profit organization with the sole purpose of preserving island environments throughout the world.

Perhaps it is fitting that he heads an island preservation organization having been born and raised on an island- Long Island, N.Y. In 1975, while at Columbia Law School, he received an internship with Life of the Land, an environmental organization in Hawaii.

There, he experienced the beauty of islands and the culture of those islands. He was so moved by his experience that he dropped out of law school and devoted his life to preserving our natural heritage.

"While working in Hawaii I went snorkeling for the first time in Hanauma Bay," Silverstein said. "While I grew up, the only fish I ever saw were in a fish store and they were dead and gray. Seeing all those colorful fish in the water was a case of love at first sight."

After getting a master's degree in Public Policy at the University of California, Berkeley, Silverstein directed the Goldman Fund, one of the largest philanthropic foundations in northern California. During his 18 years as director, the Goldman Fund became one of the nation's leading benefactors of marine projects.

Silverstein in Nakalavu, Fiji, during the June 2005 dedication of a Seacology-supported community center. Seacology constructed the center in exchange for an agreement by the village to protect 2,000 acres of ancestral rainforest for a period of 20 years.

The Fund provided \$5,000,000 to National Geographic's Sustainable Seas program, which enabled Dr. Sylvia Earle to explore the marine reserves of the United States in a one-person submarine. Silverstein also ran the Goldman Environmental Prize program which TIME magazine and other media throughout the world dubbed the "Nobel Prize of the Environment." Many recipients have been working on projects to preserve coral reefs throughout the world.

After many years with Goldman Fund, he decided he wanted to play an even more direct role in saving coral reefs. Thus, for the last six years, he has headed Seacology, an organization founded by Dr. Paul. Seacology gives residents of developing islands around the world a tangible benefit they request - such as a kindergarten, community center, fresh water delivery system - in exchange for establishing a marine-protected area. The islanders receive a much needed benefit that they could never afford in exchange for protecting their fragile coral reefs.

Because most of Seacology's projects are in islands such as Fiji, Yap, Komodo, Sri Lanka, etc., the buildings Seacology funds are very reasonably priced by U.S. standards. The typical project budget is around \$20,000. For

that, Seacology not only constructs a school or community center but establishes a marine reserve as well. "This is typical of our low-cost high leverage projects," Silverstein said.

Several times a year Silverstein leads trips to visit Seacology projects around the world. "The diving is fantastic, the people who come on our trips are great but the absolute highlights of the trip are the ceremonies and hospitality offered by the local village people," he said. "It is amazing to see what an impact the buildings we fund have on these very poor but very friendly villages. We are treated like family and on every trip most participants are moved to tears by the experience."

Silverstein has met with many presidents of the United States, Secretaries-General of the United Nations and kings and queens throughout the world, but he admits those experiences pale in comparison to some islanders he has met. "My most memorable moments at work have been meeting with wonderful island people when we come to open our projects and then dive in a marine reserve that Seacology helped establish."

Please visit www.seacology.org, for more information.

About The Author
MICHELLE SLADE, born and raised in New Zealand, is the founder and principal of Slade Communications, a northern California-based public relations firm. Michelle has previously been a dive operator in the South Pacific island nation of Vanuatu.