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Teens find, turn in cache of marijuana.(News)

Daily Herald (Arlington Heights, IL) July 16 , 2005

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Some McHenry area teens doing volunteer work on vacation ended up helping a Caribbean island clean up more than sunbathers' picnic garbage.

While doing a beach clean-up on Providenciales, one of the Turks and Caicos islands, the teens found 14 brick-size bags of marijuana and alerted authorities.

"It was quite a story," said Brian Been, product development manager for Turks and Caicos tourism. "The police stated the drugs were probably old ... but the amount was very unusual."

The teens were participants in a program for at-risk youths run jointly by the Northern Illinois Special Recreation Association and Scuba Empowerment Through Challenge, a branch of the Downers Grove- based Diveheart Foundation.

The goal is to give the youths opportunities to participate in positive, worthwhile activities so they don't choose destructive paths, said Sarah Holcombe, spokeswoman for the recreation association.

Through scuba diving, the teens learn self-esteem, self- confidence and how their choices bring consequences - sometimes life-or-death consequences, said scuba instructor Kevin Vaughn of Lake in the Hills.

"It's all about kids ... and challenges," he said. "It's a sport that really makes kids think about accountability of choices."

Between dives, kayaking and parasailing, the teens cleaned up beaches to show appreciation to the Turks and Caicos government and the local businesses that provided donations to make the trip more affordable.

That's when the marijuana was found.

"A plastic bag was protruding through the sand. A girl tried to pick it up and ended up having to dig it up," Vaughn said.

The stash was thought to be one of the largest found in several years, though officials would not comment.

"None of it was brought home as souvenirs," Vaughn said.

Police, who continue to investigate, wanted to give the teens awards for their assistance, Been said. The irony of teens' reasons for being there did not escape officials, he said.

"What was impressive is what the kids said ... they were glad they found it because if anyone else had found it, (he or she) may have kept it," Been said. "It was such a remarkable group of youths. They served as ambassadors for your country, excellent ones."

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