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NEW PIER AT SEA BASE NAMED IN HONOR OF DOUGLASS' 30 YEARS OF SERVICE

By

Jim McCarthy

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With a big grin, Keith Douglass looks out at a newly-constructed concrete pier spanning 285 feet at the Florida Sea Base in Islamorada. In the years to come, thousands of scouts across the country will set foot on the pier — named after Douglass — as they hop on sailboats for an adventure in one of the most diverse ecosystems in America.

The facilities director of the high adventure program base for the past 11 years, Douglass couldn't help but reflect on his 30 years of service and many memories as an executive with the Boy Scouts of America. Count his 10 years as a cub scout and boy scout, and Douglass has been a member of the Boy Scout family for 40 years.



Keith Douglass and his wife, Diane, stand on the newly-constructed Douglass Pier at the Florida Sea Base in Islamorada. Douglass recently retired after 30 years working with Boy Scouts of America. FLORIDA SEA BASE/Contributed

Just recently, Douglass decided to call it a career. In celebrating his many years with Boy Scouts, a ceremony was held with friends and family at the Sea Base to officially unveil Douglass Pier. Of his 30 years with Boy Scouts, half was spent at the Florida Sea Base.

"I so much enjoyed working here and being a part of the Sea Base family," he said. "I truly miss it already. I still come back and do some work as a consultant when they need me and as a volunteer.

"It truly is a family in my 40 years with Boy Scouts," he continued. "I still go back to people who served on my staff, facilities and program departments, and they still keep in touch with me. Some are married with children now. It's just so neat."

A Philadelphia native, Douglass first became involved with scouting in 1960 as a cub scout. He obtained the arrow of light award and ended up joining

Paoli Troop 1 when he was 11 years old. Douglass earned the Eagle Scout rank in 1967 with a bronze and silver palm. He also earned the Ad Altare Dei Catholic scouting's religious award.

Douglass earned his bachelor's degree in business administration and completed graduate work in the same discipline and is also a U.S. Navy veteran.

In his 30 years as an executive with Boy Scouts of America, Douglass served in various capacities as district executive, senior district executive, senior exploring executive and field director positions in the Chester County Council. In 1986, at age 34, he became the scout executive of the Sullivan Trail Council in Elmira, N.Y., where he served four years.

Douglass' career began at the Florida Sea Base in 1990 when he accepted a position offered by founder Sam Wampler for director of programming. From their home in Watkins Glen, N.Y., Douglass, his wife, Diane, and two kids, who were 4 and 8 at the time, traveled to the Sea Base aboard their 24-foot sailboat "Ginny." The journey took 52 days.

Serving as programming director for four years, Douglass left in 1994 following his election to the Monroe Board of County Commissioners. Upon completing his four-year term in 1998, Douglass became development director for Rural Health Network and executive director of the Crane Point Museum in Marathon.

Douglass was invited back to professional scouting 2009 as director of facilities at the Sea Base. Returning to the Sea Base following his political and civic stints, constructing the pool on the grounds, and dedicating four new staff housing buildings are among the memories he looks back on.

"Being able to get the pool and workforce housing built was amazing," he said. "And I'll never forget the naming of Wampler Way."

Then there are the memories Douglass has with the many people he ran into during his time at the Sea Base. Douglass said he could go on and on with the special times he cherishes.

"Seeing them grow up has been really special," he said. "Diane and I attended a wedding here at the base among staff members getting married, and that was very special," he said. "Both my daughters work here, so seeing that happen was a memory."

As to what Douglass will miss most, it's the people and the projects in store for the Sea Base.

"The challenges of projects that you know are making such a difference in the lives of young people, I'm certainly going to miss that," he said. "There are things that the Sea Base has planned, including the redesigning of the campuses. I'll try to see some of it as a consultant, but not being directly part of it is something I'll miss."

Those who worked with Douglass relayed their thoughts during the ceremony, including David DeBrule, the former owner of Upper Keys Marine Construction company that built the new pier.

"We had to work together to make it happen. We had to do it in phases to make everybody happy," he said. "This whole marina exists because of him."

Sharon Wampler, wife of the late Sam Wampler, said her husband would be proud of everything Douglass has done. Longtime friend Roy Gonas, who knew Douglas through Rotary, said he couldn't find one negative thing to say.

"He's devoted to family, faith and community and what he contributed through leadership and advice has been tremendous," Gonas said.

Mike Johnson, executive director of the Sea Base, met Douglass in 1990 while working at the Sea Base. From his arrival via sailboat at the old dock to working with Douglass, Johnson relayed just how dedicated he was during his years with the Sea Base.

"Keith Douglass made a difference in the lives of thousands of young people during his 15 years at the Sea Base and 15 years as a BSA professional with Chester County Council," he said. "Service to others is how Keith has lived his life, including parish council member in his church, service to Monroe County as a commissioner and mayor and as an assistant Rotary governor. He is a truly good person who cares about others; it's been a pleasure to serve with him."

Keith and Diane, who retired two years ago from her 40-year career in nursing, are staying busy with their marine surveying business. Keith said he also plans to continue his volunteering work as a member of Islamorada's Achievable Housing Committee and Marathon Rotary Club.

"They definitely keep me busy," he said.

Douglass holds a U.S. Coast Guard commercial 100-ton master's license with auxiliary sail endorsement. He enjoys boating, fishing, diving, playing guitar and driving his 1978 MGB sports car.