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# ‘Scuba diving is my life, being a basurero is my job’ – ScuBasurero

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Alaminos City, Pangasinan – For Mamerto Polbiran, a 62-year-old scuba diver, this is what could describe his work here at the Hundred Islands National Park (HINP).

Polbiran or Tatay Pol to many of his younger colleagues is a native of Alaminos. He leads the group of scuba divers trained and organized by the local government of Alaminos City to take care of the remaining coral reefs and the replanting of corals at HINP.

They call themselves “Scubasurero,” a term they coined by combining the words scuba and ‘basurero,’ or trash collector. They forage for garbage under the waters around the islands.



**MEET THE SCUBASUREROS** – Mamerto Polbiran (second from right), at 62, is the oldest among this team of volunteer ‘scubasureros (underwater trash collectors) at the Hundred Islands National Park in Alaminos City, Pangasinan. (Jojo Riñoza)

Tatay Pol has been diving for four decades now. “I had an American friend, he was my neighbor and he is a dive instructor of PADI (Professional Association of Diving Instructor), he is the one who taught me how to dive, I was only 21 years old then.” says Polbiran speaking in Tagalog.

“Every time he was on vacation here we always dive, even during night time, until I became a licensed scuba diver,” he added.

Tatay Pol has been working at HINP with Philippine Tourism Authority (PTA) as a maintenance employee, until he learned scuba diving. He eventually became one of the scuba divers at the HINP.

He knows the underwater world around the islands like the palm of his hand.

In 1992, Tatay Pol was one of the divers commissioned by former President Fidel V. Ramos to put up an artificial reef between Quezon Island and Lopez Island at the HINP.

He also helped with a project of the University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute on giant clams.

With his vast experience in the sea world, Tatay Pol has memorized the names and kinds of different corals that abound in HINP.

Polbiran laments that climate change has really affected marine life in the area. "Corals below 10-20 feet are affected by warm temperature as many of them dies," he said.

"Kapag mainit talaga ang panahon apektado talaga sila, laluna na ang mga giant clams, Pero yung mga nasa malalim (40-60 feet) medyo okay pa naman, but still, they are "threatened" of climate change," he added.

The local government of Alaminos organized the 'scubasurero' program in 2015 with the help of the Department of Environment and Natural Waters (DENR) in a bid to protect HINP.

The HINP now has 26 volunteer scuba divers who are also employees of the local government. They rotate their schedules, together with the divers from the Philippine National Police (PNP), Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) and Philippine Coast Guard (PCG).

Currently, Tatay Pol is the oldest diver at the HINP, although he is now on his senior years, he has no plans to hang his flippers. "I dive because I love nature. My body always wants to dive. I will always dive until I cannot," he added.

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