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Author Brings the Pacific to Ashburn

Ashburn's Maria DiPaolo-Greer has published a book of photographs and narratives of her experiences diving in the South Pacific, specifically in the waters near the Republic of Palau and Papua New Guinea. *A Delicate Balance: The South Pacific* is designed for both divers and non-divers alike, to introduce them to the variety of underwater life in the area. DiPaolo hopes that her book promotes understanding of the marine ecosystem, especially the predators and the plight of the coral reefs.

DiPaolo-Greer began work on the book three years ago. The photos were taken during two months of diving in the area. The author decided to focus on the South Pacific area because it was so wild in comparison to other diving locations that she had been exposed to. DiPaolo-Greer says that the underwater environment is completely different than the Caribbean with more underwater creatures to seek out. The author shared her favorite species, the blue ringed octopus, just the size of a golf ball. She expressed the hope that readers could use her work as a guidebook for their own adventures.

Originally from Ottawa, DiPaolo-Greer and her husband moved to Ashburn in 1999 for work. During the day, DiPaolo-Greer works as a contractor for the US Army, but notes that it is all dry work. Shortly before the move, she was introduced to diving by a friend. After training in Ottawa, her first ocean diving experience was in Fiji. She credits her husband, Melvin Greer, as her biggest supporter. Calling him her diving buddy, DiPaolo-Greer notes her husband gave her the first camera she used to photograph the marine life.

DiPaolo-Greer's photography soon attracted attention from friends and diving professionals. She believes that what makes her work popular is her appreciation for macro-photography, getting close to the subject and then magnifying her work later. Samples of her South Pacific photography are available at DiPaolo-Greer's website, DiverAtHeart.com, along with video of her expeditions. She is already planning a second book, dealing with her experiences diving in the Caribbean.

Although she has been to the Caribbean several times, DiPaolo-Greer noted that the Caribbean coral reefs have been significantly damaged by man. Saying that the undersea environment is "deteriorating so fast," DiPaolo-Greer hopes to capture some of its unique features before it is lost.

Part of the proceeds of *A Delicate Balance* will be donated to REEF, The Reef Environmental Educational Foundation. REEF is a grass-roots organization attempting to conserve marine ecosystems through education.

When asked what advice she had for novice divers, having fun topped DiPaolo-Greer's list. "You won't regret the decision." In regards to safety, she said that the most important thing is to remain calm. The rest will take care of itself as long as a diver does not get cocky or begin to panic. A new diver needs to be mindful of safety, but DiPaolo-Greer noted that this can be dealt with by solid diver training.

DiPaolo-Greer will be the special guest at Adventure Company's Holiday Social event from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Dec. 8. The event is open to the public. In addition to refreshments and a raffle, DiPaolo-Greer will be discussing her book and her history of diving. Adventure Company is located at 13901 Metrotech Drive in Chantilly.