

A Renaissance Man for All Seasons

Company's performance management chief has wide-ranging hobbies

BY PARRI SONTAG

YOU might call Al Scott a "Jack of all trades." But unlike Jack, Scott is a master of many. From scuba and competitive shooting to furniture making, fly fishing and martial arts, Scott — who heads up the Consumers Energy performance management team — crams his free time with a myriad of hobbies, many of which he performs at advanced levels.

A summertime sailor, wintertime cross country skier and year-round short wave radio enthusiast, the 51-year-old Scott even finds time for leather work and authentic Sioux bead work.

"I build up all this stress, trying to get to all my hobbies," he laughs.

And, living the phrase "poetry in motion," while partaking in many of these activities, Scott crafts little ditties on life:



■ Scott travels to Key Largo twice a year to scuba dive along a coral reef. He sometimes encounters a school of barracudas.

*The mountain speaks with silent tongue
In a language older than time.
A measured cadence that cautions all,
To keep the soul in rhyme.
From the mountains' womb we are born,
To walk an unknown time.
And if we listen, we then will know,
The secrets of the climb.*

"I write mostly for me," he said. "I guess it comes from being introspective. I enjoy a lot of activities that lend themselves to nature and questions like, 'What's it all



■ Al Scott, a 28-year employee, communicates all over the world via "ham" radio. ABOVE PHOTO: HARRY SABOURIN

about, Alfie?"

Five years ago, for instance, Scott started exploring under the sea, after buying an introductory diving package at a charity silent auction.

"It was one of those things I always wanted to do," he said. "The first time I saw it was in the Cub Scouts. Then I was fascinated by that Lloyd Bridges TV series 'Sea Hunt.'"



After completing his initial diving course, Scott passed his basic certification. The next thing he knew, he was getting certified in advanced and rescue diving.

Scott is now working toward a master scuba diver's certification and travels to Key Largo at least twice a year.

"Some of the most spectacular reefs in the world are there," he said. "You're diving among tuna, parrot fish, octopi. Other than your own breathing, it's a very silent world.

"There's a very strong sense that you are a visitor in a foreign place where you don't belong. It's a very introspective experience."

Scott has swum through schools of barracuda and even encountered sharks. Fortunately, his encounters have been of the nurse and sand shark variety.

"They attack, but not typically," he said. Still, he limits night diving to lakes.

"Nothing down there is gonna eat me," he said, referring to himself as "Chicken of the Sea."

With night diving, he said, one's visibility is limited to about six feet.

"That's scary, considering that's when the bigger fish come out to feed," he said.

To avoid such contact, Scott mused, "I have an agreement with them. I stay out of the ocean when they're feeding, and they stay out of my bathtub."

Above the water, Scott's an avid fly fisherman and keeps a 27-foot sailboat in Traverse City. Among his many adventures, he and wife, Gay, also a Consumers employee, actually got marooned once.

"We got marooned on Beaver Island," he laughed. "We drank piña coladas, hung out and did the Jimmy Buffet thing for a few days. It was hardly 'Gilligan's Island.'"

Scott said he enjoys hobbies that become life-long learning experiences — "where the degree of danger is directly proportionate to your own ignorance."

A competitive shooter, for instance, he custom built his own high-powered rifle and loads his own ammunition.

This allows him better control of bullet weight and powder charge, leading to better accuracy and consistency.

Adding to his long list of hobbies, Scott has studied judo, jujitsu, tai kwon do and karate. He's adapted what he's learned into a self defense class and rape prevention program for women. More than 350 women — most of them Consumers employees — have been trained by him.

He also enjoys furniture making and is most proud of a cherry spindle cradle he

Taking Aim at Other Interests

AL SCOTT has been shooting competitively since he was eight. "I have pictures of me sitting on my father's lap and shooting, before I was old enough to even hold a gun," he said. "He held it, and I shot it."

Today Scott primarily does metallic silhouette shooting — both high-powered rifle (AA Class) and small bore (AAA class). In shooting competitions, classes are like golf handicaps. AAA is the highest.

Scott regularly participates in international competitions and has shot alongside members of the U.S. Olympic, Army and Marine Corps teams.

His all-time competition best: 10th place in the 1990 national championships in Ridgeway, Pa.

His involvement in competitive shooting also has led to other hobbies.

"I used to go to 'Black Powder Rendezvous,' where I'd compete in events from the 1820s to the 1840s — black powder muzzle loading, throwing knives and tomahawks, firestarting with flint and steel," he said.

Participants made their own clothing and accessories, sparking an interest in leather carving and Lakota Indian beadwork.

Scott has decorated hunting pouches, moccasins and knife sheaths, replicating designs he finds in books and museums. ■

built for his granddaughter and a curio cabinet that stands proudly in his dining room.

He also holds an advanced class short-wave ("ham") radio license and transmits over a radio he built himself. He's been licensed since he was 14.

"It's opened up the world to me," he said. "I have people I talk to on a regular basis all over the globe."

"One of the most fascinating people I ever met was a lady physician who operates a medical clinic for black children in South Africa."

"I also used to have a fellow I talked to on a regular basis in Russia, back when the Cold War was in full bloom." ■