

Kiteboarding University

PAUL MENTA TAKES KITE INSTRUCTION TO THE CLASSROOM. MICHAEL BEHAR

 **A master's degree in**

kiteboarding? Well, not exactly. But when classes commence this spring at Kiteboarding University, enrolled students will be able to accrue actual college credits while learning the basics of the sport. Lesson topics will include equipment setup, launching and landing, safety tips, gear repair and weather awareness.

School founder Paul Menta, a 41-year-old teaching guru and former pro kiter, recently resigned as head of training for the Professional Air Sports Association (PASA) to launch "Kite U," as he dubs it, because of a ghastly hole he spotted in the conventional approach to teaching new kites. "There was no resource to help you before, during and after lessons, and that really bothered me," says Menta. His solution is a three-and-a-half-hour seminar taught weekly at Florida Keys Community College in Key West. Annual tuition: \$150.

Don't live in Margaritaville? Not a problem. Kite U is Web-friendly. Classes will be simulcast live on the school's website (kiteboardinguniversity.com)

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Kids, in today's class you will learn about wind, safety and — most importantly — how to catch big air.

and later archived — and iPod downloadable — for anyone who misses a lecture or just wants to review a recent lesson. Menta has lined up several guest speakers, too. "I'm bringing in a meteorologist from NOAA [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration], an engineer from an aeronautical design company, an EMT instructor and a captain from the Coast Guard," he says. Real-time chat sessions will let "virtual" students pose questions to the experts and participate in class discussions.

There will be required homework and exams (sorry,

no slackers), part of which will entail uploading photos or videos of yourself kiting so class instructors can evaluate your stance and style. Students will also get access to a 24-hour support line. "If you feel like you are about to kite in a potentially dangerous situation and need advice, you can call us right from the beach," says Menta. "We have the phone support because a lot of beginners are afraid to ask someone for help for fear of looking stupid and not being cool."

Successful graduates will get a spiffy "kiteboarding diploma" that Menta expects

to trump the PASA and International Kiteboarding Organization (IKO) certifications. "It won't be long before everyone knows about Kite U just like they do PASA and IKO," he says.

But Kite U is not a substitute for hands-on learning, insists Menta. The coursework is intended as a supplement to one-on-one lessons with a professional instructor. "Beginners usually have a zillion questions, but there just isn't time in a typical class to ask them all," he says. "With Kite U, there will always be a resource for people who want extra help."