



Flatten your castles

Sandcastle event raises awareness to clean, flat and dark beaches during turtle season

JULIA ROBERTS
News-Leader

A local graduate student used the opportunity of a class project to bring international sand artists to Fernandina Beach to inspire the public to keep beaches safe for nesting sea turtles.

Keep Nassau Beautiful and local graduate student Rhin James sponsored the Last Castle on the Beach event Saturday at Main Beach. International artists Andy Gertler from the Sand Masters TV show and Sue Beatrice of Sand Sculpt USA, as well as local sculptor Jenn Cook, created a large turtle conservation themed sand sculpture at the volleyball courts.

“It was just an awesome and incredible event,” Keep Nassau Beautiful Executive Director Lynda Bell said. Observers visited the site throughout the day, and about 40 people were on hand when the sand sculpture was demolished by children, which was a lesson to teach beach goers to leave the beach clean, flat and dark so as to ensure mother sea turtles can get onto the beach, lay their eggs and make it back to the ocean during nesting season, which begins May 1.

Sandcastles, holes, moats, and even beach equipment like chairs and umbrellas can create obstacles for sea turtles

searching for nesting sites. In addition, these obstacles can create traps for hatchlings, hindering their ability to reach the ocean.

Rhin James, a local CPA who is pursuing a Masters Degree in Biology “just for fun,” told the News-Leader she wanted to teach community-based conservation through art, and so invited the artists to Fernandina Beach. She said Gertler and Beatrice travel the world sculpting. Among other projects, they create art from Amazon boxes, and are scheduled to do a pumpkin carving in New York in the fall. James said both of the artists are looking forward to returning to Fernandina Beach.

The event was purely educational, Bell said. Fundraising for the project, to pay the artists and for the sand, was done ahead of time.

Sponsors for the program include Amelia Clay Guild, The Atlantic Contemporary, Island Art Association, Jotkoff Financial Group, Saylors Accounting and Tax, Scuba Station, Surfings’s Evolution & Preservation Foundation, Omni Amelia Island, Amelia Island Sea Turtle Watch. Kathy Russell, Conservation Manager for the the city of Fernandina Beach, helped coordinate the event.

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PHOTOS BY JULIA ROBERTS/NEWS-LEADER
Kids destroy a sandcastle made during the sandcastle event held to spread awareness of keeping the beach clean, flat and dark during sea turtles season, which begins upon the first sea turtle nest laid on Amelia Island, typically in May.

Saturday, May 31, 2025

Fernandina Harbor Marina

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EARLY BIRD ENTRY IS \$350 THROUGH MAY 15TH. THEN \$400 THROUGH MAY 29TH @ 6PM, THEN \$450.

RODEO DIVISION – 6 SPECIES PAID

1ST PLACE - \$1,300 2ND PLACE - \$700

(BASED ON 100 PAID ENTRIES)

EARLY BIRD ENTRY IS \$100 THROUGH MAY 15TH. THEN \$150 THROUGH MAY 29TH @ 6PM, THEN \$175.

ENHANCED TRAVELER AWARD - \$7,500 IN ADDITIONAL CASH AWARDS - STAY IN AN AMELIA ISLAND HOTEL FOR 2 NIGHTS, ENTER THE KINGFISH TOURNAMENT OR THE FISHING RODEO AND RECEIVE **\$250 CASH** PLUS BE ELIGIBLE TO WIN AN ADDITIONAL **\$2500**. The largest Kingfish or Cobia wins \$1,000, The largest Sheephead, Trout, Redfish, Flounder or Sea Bass wins \$1000 and All other Travelers that weighed a fish will be entered into a \$500 drawing.

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Pick up your boat number Friday, May 30th from 3 to 8 p.m.

Mandatory Captains Meeting at 7 p.m. at Fernandina Harbor Marina