

Friday, October 28, 2011
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ART IN THE SAND

Fort Myers Beach festival
celebrates 25 years

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coverstory

"Wow, that's amazing! How do they do that?"

Sculptors to hit sand

Annual sandsculpting begins Wednesday on Fort Myers Beach

BY CHARLES RUNNELLS
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You name a job at the annual American Sandsculpting Championship, and Ann Alsop has probably done it.

For 25 years, the Fort Myers Beach woman has collected tickets, tended bar, waved cars into parking lots and much, much more.

Practically the only thing she hasn't done is sand sculpting, itself.

"Noooo..." she says when asked if she's ever competed in sand sculpting. "I look a lot, but that's as far as I go."

There's plenty to look at, of course. And Alsop always looks forward to seeing what the sculptors do.

IF YOU GO

- **What:** 25th Annual American Sandsculpting Championship & Beach Festival
- **When:** 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday, Nov. 2-6.
- **Where:** Gullwing Beach Resort, 6620 Estero Blvd., Fort Myers Beach.
- **Admission:** Free (although admission is \$5 to get a closer view in the galleries, \$3 for children. A family rate of \$10 covers as many as 2 adults with children).
- **Information:** 454-7500 or sandsculptingfestival.com

She'll get her chance next week, when the festival celebrates its 25th anniversary with live bands, food and, of course, plenty of stunning sand sculpture.

The sculptors have gotten better and better every year, Alsop says.

"They've learned as we've learned," she says. "In the begin-

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ning, it wasn't that fancy.

"Now they can do almost anything."

Over the years, sculptors have turned Fort Myers Beach's sugar-white sand into mermaids, dragons, snowmen and anything else they could imagine. And, yes, they've sculpted sand castles, too — sometimes towering a story or two above the beach.

John Albion remembers attending the sand sculpting festival long before he took the reins three years ago as president of the Fort Myers Beach Area Chamber of Commerce.

"I remember being amazed," he says. "It's always been a good event. And people have always said, 'Wow, that's amazing! How do they do that?'"

The chamber started the festival 25 years ago. Now

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— *John Albion, president of the Fort Myers Beach Area Chamber of Commerce*

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Over the years, sculptors have come to Fort Myers Beach from as far away as Latvia, The Netherlands and Singapore, Albion says.

This year's championship features 16 master sculptors. Many of them will go on to compete in the World Championship of Sand Sculpting (an event that will be held in Fort Myers Beach for the first time in mid-November).

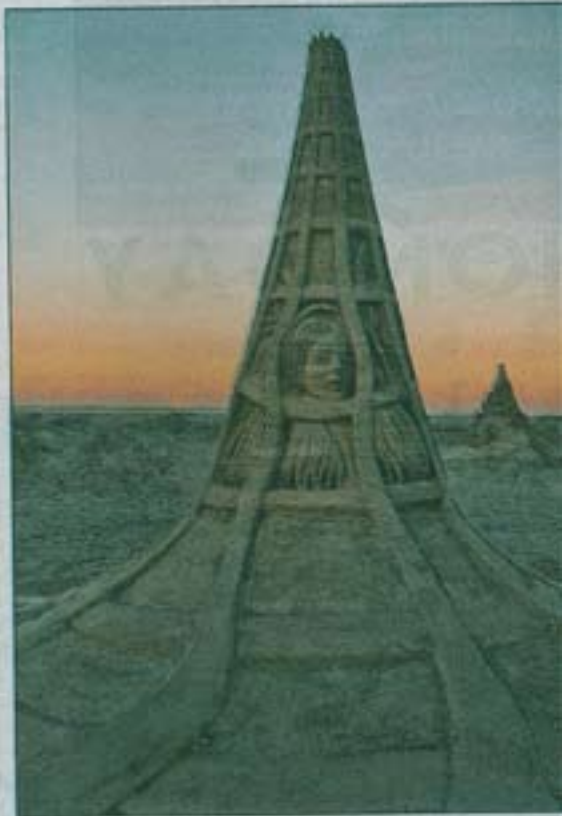
Longtime sculptor "Amazin'" Walter McDonald started competing at

the American Sandsculpting Championship in 1992. He's been back almost every year since then, and he'll be there again next week.

"I go back every time I can," he says. "I just love to be there. I've got friends there. Those other sand sculptors are just like family now."

The sculptures have gotten better and bigger every year, Festival chairman Andrew Cochrane says. And they've gotten taller, too, sometimes reaching heights of 15-20 feet.

"They're always trying new things," he says.



SPECIAL TO THE NEWS-PRESS

Kirk Rademaker won sixth place last year with "Fis