



## Building castles on the strand

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COASTAL MONMOUTH BUREAU

BELMAR -- For John Klein, 21, it was the the 18th annual New Jersey Sand Castle Contest -- or bust.

The recent college graduate and former Point Pleasant resident left his Maine home over the weekend with no money or car, so he traded the 14 lobsters he had caught for rides down to the Jersey Shore.

When he finally arrived Tuesday afternoon and joined friends Mike Albanese, 21, of Point Pleasant and Leny Kislowksi, 25, of Belmar, Klein had one lobster remaining. The trio, co-winners of the "Best of Beach" category last year, took the lone remaining crustacean as a sign.

Yesterday, using sand and dry Jell-O, they created a giant red lobster on the beach -- called "Johnny Lobster" in honor of Klein -- and took home the first-place prize in the 16 and up category.

"We didn't know what we were going to make, but I had one lobster left when I got here," Klein said as he handed out lobster bibs to interested onlookers. "There's a lot of love in the lobster."

More than 300 other entrants joined the three men on the beach yesterday, some starting as early as 5 a.m. to allow enough time to perfect their masterpieces. By the noon deadline, there were enough castles, clowns, alligators, cakes, cars and octopuses lining the sand to turn the beach into an surrealistic obstacle course.

Frank Sementa, owner of main contest sponsor D'Jais Oceanside Bar & Cafe and member of organizer Belmar Tourism Commission, said more people entered this year than ever before.

"It's hard to put into words what a great event is, but you know one when you see one," he said, adding that what he most enjoys is watching families work together to create their castles.

Judges rated the sculptures on creativity, resourcefulness, originality and accessorizing. There were categories for 7 and under, 8-11, 12-15, 16 and up, day camp and family.

When the judging was over, \$3,500 in prizes and giveaways -- including surf boards, sand pails and gift certificates -- were awarded, and one man held the coveted "Best of Beach" trophy: Bill Cichone, 51, of Bridgewater.

"I've been trying for three years," he said. "It's a great feeling."

Cichone, who also won a bicycle, created perhaps the most somber sculpture of the contest, a depiction of a wolf howling toward the sky while lying on top of his deceased mate. Called "All Alone," the creation was an idea that Cichone said he imagined a few years ago.

"He's mourning his mate," Cichone explained, as a horde of onlookers -- some holding cameras -- gathered around his sculpture moments after he was declared the winner. Arlene Rothman, 70, said she had an emotional reaction when she saw Cichone's creation.

"There's a lot of fun stuff over here, but that's a work of art," said Rothman, who summers in South Belmar. "He knows what he's doing."

Defending "Best of Beach" co-champions -- four best friends from Wall -- said they felt slighted this year after their sculpture, "Octopus Eating Beans," didn't even earn a top three finish in the 16 and up category.

"I'm stunned," Matt Erdely, 20. "This is unbelievable."

The foursome hit the beach at 5 a.m. yesterday to begin work on their huge creation.

"We got shafted," Chris Stadler, 20, said.

While contestants such as Erdely and Stadler were out for a title, others entered just because they enjoy playing in the sand.

"We go every year," said 12-year-old Scott Velke of Wall, who created a volcano in the sand with three of his friends. "It's real fun."

Sculptors said hard work, patience and "blistering hands" are essential elements to building an award-winning sand castle.

But water is the most important ingredient, said Chuck Feld, a professional sand sculptor who was on hand yesterday to give tips to diggers.

"Beach sand requires a lot of water," Feld, 55, of Westchester, Pa. said. "People don't use a lot of water. Every grain has to be wet."

And in the end, the water will wash everything away.

"It's a shame it has to be knocked down," Phil Rothman, 77, of South Belmar said of the "Best of Beach" winner.

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