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Building sandcastles serious business at Jersey shore

BY FRAIDY REISS • GANNETT NEW JERSEY • JULY 10, 2008

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BELMAR -- Crabs are not supposed to fall in love with lobsters.

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"That kind of thing is frowned upon in the crab kingdom," explained Michael Albanese, 25, of Point Pleasant.

However, visitors to the beach Wednesday came face to face with a giant female crab who had become smitten with a lobster and run off with him, on the day she was to wed the crab king in an arranged marriage.

Right there on the beach, for all the world to see, the enraged king and his army had cornered the outlaw couple.

Sure, the entire scene was created out of sand the winning entry in the 22nd annual New Jersey Sandcastle Contest. That did not

make it any less tragic.

"We're pretty sure Johnny Lobster is going to win the fight," said Albanese, one of 14 people who created what he said was a 40-by-20-foot sculpture. "But you can never tell."

Just less than 11,000 people attended the sand castle contest, the largest crowd in the contest's history, said Domenick Cilea, owner of the public relations firm that coordinated the event. They watched as artists of all ages molded the sand throughout the morning and crafted approximately 300 unique sculptures that lined the beach from 17th Avenue to beyond 20th Avenue.

No trace of the sand art was expected to remain today, but that did not discourage contestants who spent hours perfecting even the smallest details of their sculptures.

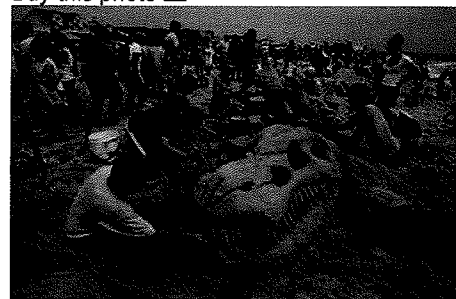
"That's the beauty of it," said Liz Maslanka, 51, of Howell, as she and nine friends labored over every window and door of a 12-foot-wide, 8-foot-high castle. "It's a Zen thing."

Elsewhere, Debbie LeSeur of East Brunswick tried to keep up with the five children, ages 6 to 10, whose sand-sculpting team she was overseeing.

"Anything I want to do, they won't let me," LeSeur lamented. "They're very strong-willed."

All the young artists wanted her to do, she said, was to run around the beach gathering black shells for their Spooky Summer haunted castle, which ended up winning third place in the 8-11 age category.

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A group of castle creators build "Castle-saurus Rex" during the Annual New Jersey Sandcastle Contest in Belmar Wednesday.

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Still, she said, slightly out of breath from her shell-collecting, she did not mind that their hard work would wash away with the tide.

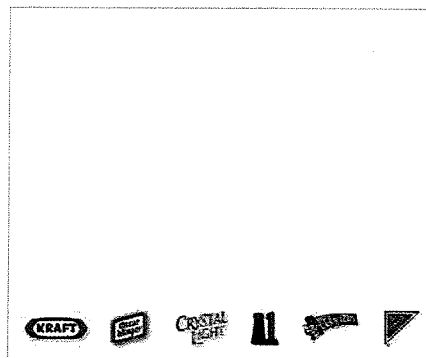
"It's worth it," LeSeur said. "They talk about it all year long."

The temporary nature of sand sculptures is part of its allure, said Frank Sementa, owner of lead event sponsor D'Jais Bar on Ocean Avenue. During each contest, the beach fills up with sculptures different from the year before, he said.

"It's like a museum," Sementa said. "A museum where the art changes every day."

WINNING SAND SCULPTURES

Best of beach: Johnny Lobster 1st place, family category: Mexican Sushi 1st place, day camp category: Brookside Flowers 1st place, ages 16 and up: Flip-Flop 1st place, ages 12-15: Happy Feet 1st place, ages 8-11: Pet Resort 1st place, ages 7 and down: Grand Canyon Race



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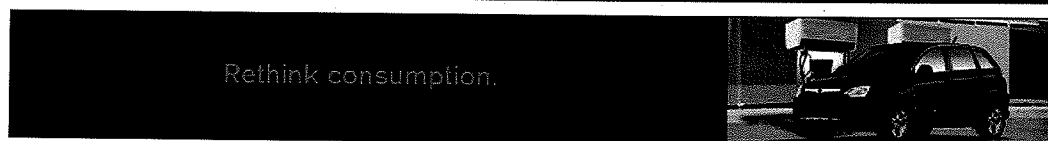
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