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About 10,000 expected to attend Belmar's 22nd annual N.J. Sandcastle Contest

BY SHEILA VALECILLOS • GANNETT NEW JERSEY • JULY 3, 2008

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Castles and superheroes will be found on the beach in Belmar — but only until the waves wash them away.

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People of all ages will be turning sand into creative sculptures with the 22nd annual New Jersey Sandcastle Contest on July 9 on the 18th Avenue beach.

"A day at the beach is always fun, but when you mix free contests, prizes, music refreshments and creative works of art made of Belmar sand, the New Jersey Sandcastle Contest is a win-win for the entire community," said Domenick Cilea, president and founder of Springboard Public Relations of Marlboro, which is helping the Belmar Tourism Commission organize the event.

The contest "is a great family-oriented beach event that attracts thousands of people of all ages to come together and use their collective imagination to design and sculpt sand creation," he said. "The sculptures are all different types of sand creations. You have your traditional folks who will stick to the castles, and you have people who make a lot of different ones, like Yankee Stadium, cartoon characters, superheroes, city skylines, landmarks, cars, and many others interesting ones," Cilea said.

The contest, which attracts 10,000 spectators and about 300 entrants, runs rain or shine from begins at 8 a.m., he said. Contestants will be sculpting until noon, with winners announced around 1:30 p.m., he said.

Prizes will be awarded in three children's age groups, a 16-and-over group, a family group, and a day camp group. Trophies are given out for first, second and third place, he said.

A DJ will play music, there will be dance contests on a platform on the beach, and there will be give-aways that include T-shirts, hats and beach accessories, Cilea said. Sponsors are providing prizes that include a bicycle, beach toys, movie tickets, gift certificates for restaurants or gift shops, and Yankees and Mets tickets, he said.

"I started out participating with my brother 15 years ago, but now I participate with my friend Denise De Presca. We use anything from paint scrapers to spoons. We use straws to blow away the excess sand, and we bought sandcastle-making tools," said Nicole D'Angelo, 30, of Tinton Falls,

a contest participant and winner for several years. Her brother, Mark D'Angelo, 26, is from Jackson, and DePresco is also 30 and from Tinton Falls, D'Angelo said.

"We have made a lot of different castles. One year when we won, we made a castle roller coaster, and we



Phillip Yow of Freehold works on his sandcastle last year during the Belmar Sandcastle Contest.

(BRADLEY J. PENNER/Gannett New Jersey)

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named it "Coaster Kingdom." It had a track on it and many moving parts, and there were tunnels and tracks. Other the years, we had a volcano as part of the castle. We also built a garden castle, and we put flowers all around it and a waterfall which gave a botanical feel to it.

"What we like most about the contest is first, the day at the beach, and of course getting to see what everyone else comes up with. They usually have professional sculptures, and just to see their work, it's worth it. They have a lot of different categories, which keeps the event very organized, and they have a DJ going on, they have characters for kids like SpongeBob. They have a big area so you really can pick your spot. They give people enough time to finish their artwork, and they're very clear on what the judging is and the crowd is very respectful," D' Angelo said.

The contest has been successful in the past and has continued to grow, said Cilea, who has been involved with the contest since 2002.

"Since then, we have taken it from 1,000 people to 10,000 people. It's great for families to come have fun at the beach, make great sculptures and show their creations by expressing their feelings," he said. "It's very interesting, and it's free to all participants.

"We assemble a panel of judges who take into account creativity and originality. The contestants show up at the beach. They bring their sandcastle tools, like pails and shovels, although we can provide tools for them," he said.

The event is sponsored by area businesses and groups, including D'Jais bar in Belmar and the Lakewood BlueClaws.

More information is available by visiting www.njsandcastle.com or by calling **(732) 681-3700**

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