

# Star-Ledger

## SpongeBob can't top towering sandscrapers

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It may not earn him extra points in class or give him the edge for a future job, but the city that civil engineering student Joe Davis designed yesterday was impressive enough to turn the heads of some very important people.

So what if the city, a replica of the Manhattan skyline, was made of sand?

It was all in the name of fun for Davis' team and 299 other entrants who tried their hand - and their tools -- at fashioning sculptures from the sands of the beach in Belmar during the 19th annual New Jersey Sand Castle contest. Davis and his team won best overall sculpture in the competition that was for most people four hours of moving sand and lugging buckets of water.

"I like how everyone comes together -- friends and family -- and have to work hard together and make amazing creations," said Tara Colabella, 17, of Old Bridge Township, who was part of a team from the Middlesex County Academy for Science, Mathematics and Engineering Technology. Her team took third place in its category for its sculpture of King Tut's tomb. "I'm definitely coming back next year."

Some planned for the event, the largest in the Northeast, for weeks or even months. And some, like 15-year-old friends Emily Ragle of Ocean Township and Melissa Cooper of Wall Township, didn't get inspired until they actually started digging.

Their creation, a giant cigarette butt made of butts collected from the beach that morning, earned them second place in their age category. And their message, "Keep your butts off the beach" was spelled out in ... what else?

"There were so many cigarette butts we thought it would be easier to use them than to pick them out," said Emily, a 12-year veteran of the contest with no wins under her bikini belt until yesterday.

They were bested by Sean Donohue, 14, of Cliffwood Beach, who sculpted a replica of Yankee Stadium, complete with miniature baseball player figures, foul poles, bases (made of flour) and turf (green food coloring).

An avid Yankees fan, Sean, wearing his team cap and T-shirt, said he was determined to improve on last year's performance, when he made a much smaller version using only a bucket and shovel.

"I'll be back to defend my title now," Sean said, after collecting his trophy and a bag of gifts, including sand-sculpting tools and some passes to Six Flags Great Adventure.

There were star fish, sea creatures and mermaids, as well as cartoon characters, cakes and pyramids. Herbie the Love Bug and SpongeBob were popular themes, too.

Judges considering entries in the eight categories were looking for creativity, resourcefulness, originality and accessories.

The contest may be a goof for some participants, but others take it very seriously. They plan their sculptures with sketches and schematics in great detail. A core group of veterans moves up and down the rankings each year as each tries to outdo the other.

Gleny Kaslowski of Belmar, along with Mike Albanese and John Klein, both of Point Pleasant, were back to defend their title in the 16 and older category. They took first place for a giant red lobster last year and a fire truck the year before.

But their 11-person team creation, a 20-foot-long whale clutching a 20-foot-long squid in its jaw, was edged out by Mark and Nicole DeAngelo's Coaster Kingdom, two castles linked by a roller coaster. That win put the Belmar couple back in the top spot they had first claimed in 2002.

That competitive spirit is what drove Davis, who is pursuing his engineering doctorate at Rutgers University, and his team, which was composed of his wife, Karen, and their friend Sue Cevasco.

The Somerset residents took third place last year in the 16 and older group for their 27-foot replica of the Petronas Towers in Malaysia and said they wouldn't be satisfied with anything less than the top spot this year. So Davis started designing Manhattan's skyline shortly after last year's competition.

Karen Davis never underestimated their determination.

"We came back to win," she said as she wheeled off with the team's prize, a \$500 fuchsia beach-cruiser bicycle.