

From

sand to masterpiece

SANDSCULPTING COMPETITION  
WILL FEATURE ELITE PERFORMERS

>>inside:  
Sandsculpting fest  
runs Nov. 3-8 on  
Fort Myers Beach.  
**A8**

BY EVAN WILLIAMS  
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MICHELANGELO NEVER HAD to create his “David” in a single weekend and watch its erosion begin immediately from the wind and waves. But artists with similar instincts will face those conditions on Fort Myers Beach this weekend. They’re the best in their field, 16 of the world’s top sand sculptors, who will be embroiled in a competition that tests both athletic endurance and artistic vision. The participants in the master’s event, headlining the 23rd

annual American Sandsculpting Championship Festival on Fort Myers Beach, are the Seurats of the Sandbox, the Rembrandts of Ready-Made, The Picassos of Impermanence, the Michelangelos of the Moment. They will be racing against the clock, and sculpting with an imperfect medium. “There just are no better sand sculptors than this group,” said Katie Corning, site manager for the event. “In the past we’ve had people

SEE SANDSCULPT, A8 ►

COURTESY PHOTO  
Karen Fralich with her winning sculpture from Texas SandFest 2009, “Change of Seasons.” She’s one of the competitors on Fort Myers Beach this week.

Lee County’s roads insufficient for cyclists

New legislation could bring change

BY EVAN WILLIAMS  
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Lee County roads, like many in Florida, were built for cars, not to walk across or bicycle along. There are still not enough bicyclists to justify the cost of adding signs and stripes to roadways people bicycle on — let alone widening the shoulder on roads that have little or no

space for cyclists, according to the Lee County Department of Transportation. “If you look at Six Mile Cypress (Parkway) or Daniels Parkway, you’ll see thousands and thousands of cars for every bicycle,” said Paul Wingard, director of Lee DOT. “Does it make sense, if you’ve got a fixed amount of money, to spend it on that one bicycle?” Mr. Wingard also says that simply

SEE CYCLISTS, A10 ►



COURTESY PHOTO  
Lee County commissioners meet this month to discuss making county roads more bike-friendly.



Help for dog problems

Don’t wait for little problems to become big ones — get help with unwanted behavior early. **A37 ►**

INSIDE



An eclectic indie mix

Official guide and insider’s buzz list of things to do at the Naples International Film Festival. **C1 ►**



Wine Fest kickoff

And other society events in Lee County. **C28, 30, 31 & 32 ►**



Parlaying a windfall

Jason Fry aims to be the Battery King of Southwest Florida after hitting a lottery jackpot. **B1 ►**

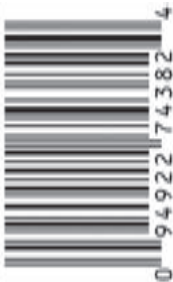
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# SANDSCULPT

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carve once a year and they do it here. This is really the cream of the crop, the best of the best. The finished piece may look like stone, especially with our white sand, but it is fragile and will not stand the test of time or the elements.”

The Fort Myers Beach event is one of five sandsculpting competitions in the United States to qualify participants for the World Championship of Sand Sculpting in Federal Way, Wash., next Labor Day weekend. The top five will also win cash prizes (\$1,500 for first place).

“If you win in Fort Myers, you’re automatically in the World Championships,” said Doc Reiss, chairman of the World Championship.

*Florida Weekly* spoke with two of the sculptors last week about what it takes to be the best. Karen Fralich, 40, hailing from Ontario, Canada, is billed as the most decorated female sand sculptor in the world. Carl Jara, 36, from Cleveland Heights, Ohio is the reigning solo world champion of sand-sculpting.

On Friday morning, on a stretch of beach north and south of the Holiday Inn Beach Resort, each sculptor will approach a pile of sand weighing upwards of 10 tons. The next four hours or so will be spent shoveling it into molds used to form the sculpture’s basic shape.

“Honestly, it’s brutal work and you’re trying to (shovel) it as fast as possible so you can have your lunch break and switch gears so you can start carving,” Mr. Jara said.

After preparing the sand, often shaping it or stacking it in plastic or wooden molds, the competitors utilize any number of tools: garden hoes, pocket-knives, horsehair brushes and drinking straws used to blow tiny particles out of delicate crevices.

“I use pretty much anything,” Ms. Fralich said. “Drywall trowels, kitchen utensils, spoons, shovels, stuff from the garden. The cool thing about sand is you can carve it with anything.”

Some competitors may start at a relaxed pace. But by Sunday mid-morning, for many, it is a dash to the finish.

“The creativity is on a time scale,” Mr. Jara said. “That’s probably one of the most important things here as well. You are forced into a time frame with your creativity. You are forced to turn that on and accept it. You hope those things all line up in the end. Once that final buzzer sounds, you’re done.”

That will happen at 1 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 8. Mr. Jara explained that the buzzer, “is generally something loud and annoying, one of those airhorns, or in South Padre Island (a sand-sculpting competition in Texas), they use a conch shell. Nobody has more time than anybody else, unless one of the competitors sleeps in or something.”

## Strengths and weaknesses

Over the course of the competition, each sculptor will face his or her own unique challenges and try to play to individual strengths. For instance, Mr. Jara is physically prepared to shovel sand as fast as anyone.

“I’m always doing something hard and physical,” he said. “I live in the snow belt in Cleveland so I’m shoveling 6 feet of snow all winter. I’m so used to shoveling.”

And although he doesn’t do sand-sculpting professionally, year-round

“Honestly, it’s brutal work and you’re trying to (shovel) it as fast as possible so you can have your lunch break and switch gears so you can start carving.”

— Carl Jara, 36, from Cleveland Heights, Ohio, the reigning solo World Champion of sandsculpting

like Ms. Fralich — his day job involves building exhibits for the Cleveland Museum of Natural History — Mr. Jara is a professional woodworker.

One of his weaknesses, however, could be the sand itself. In previous competitions, he has been more accustomed to using imported sand, which generally has rougher edges that bond together more securely than the natural wind-worn sugar sand on Fort Myers Beach.

“Beach sand is temperamental,” he said. “Only having been to Fort Myers twice, the last time I was there I did this piece that was really crazy daring and it fell down the day after the contest. I just pushed it too far.”

Mr. Jara’s weakness may be Ms. Fralich’s strength: she’s more familiar with Fort Myers Beach sand.

“I think this is my sixth trip to Fort Myers,” she said. “Strength wise, (the sand) is incredible. It’s some of the best natural carving sand I’ve ever seen. It’s very, very fine, almost like powder. It also has silt in it. A lot of beach sands don’t have any silt (which helps it bond more firmly). The only challenge is also one of its greatest qualities. It’s pure white. It’s beautiful. It’s so white that sometimes it’s hard to get shadows and details to show up on your carvings.”

Getting impressive shadows and details is one key to winning the event, Mr. Jara said.

“Depth of cut is probably the single biggest indicator of somebody’s achievement,” he said. “Do they have shadows (in their sculpture) or is it just kind of a scratch in the surface? Have they really separated entities? Do you have this beautiful contrast of light and dark and fulfillment of form? If you can squint your eyes and see the form they used, it’s a pretty good indication they haven’t achieved that level (of master sculptor) yet.”

## How the works are judged

As soon as the clock runs out Sunday at 1 p.m., the 16 participants, probably worn out and dirty, go about judging each other’s work.

“After we’re all finished, they give us a few minutes to get ourselves together because you’re a little tired,” Ms. Fralich said. “You’re looking first and foremost at the ‘wow’ factor. After you look at it, then you walk around it and analyze it technically and look for some risky ideas or something new and fresh or just an incredible sculpture from all sides. There are many, many criteria. And because it’s art, it’s very subjective. After you’ve looked at all the sculptures, you decide who you think are the top five.”

The winner is guaranteed a spot at the World Championship event. Mr. Jara and Ms. Fralich have already qualified to compete at the World’s because of past wins. Hypothetically, if they were to place in the top two on

Fort Myers Beach, that would open up two more spaces to be filled at the World’s.

## Playing in the sand

This may be playing in the sand at its most extreme, a combination of art and sport that tests the body, mind and spirit — the Greek ideal of man. But World’s event chair Mr. Reiss suggested that it’s still just playing in the sand.

“I don’t know if it’s primordial or what,” Mr. Reiss said. “People get around sand and water and they typically play.”

And in spite of all the talk of competition, sand sculptors are generally a close-knit group.

“The sandsculpting community isn’t very big so we bump into each other all the time,” Ms. Fralich said. “It’s always like a mini reunion when we get together.”

She doesn’t know the exact number of people worldwide who are considered master sand sculptors. But she travels around the globe regularly because of her work as a professional sand sculptor for hire.

“I’m going to say there are 30 people (in the world) that do this professionally and compete all the time,” she said. “And maybe 300 that have real jobs and do this at a master’s level occasionally.”

## Artistry aplenty

Once he has shoveled furiously, Mr. Jara often stops all motion, allowing the clock to keep ticking as he waits — and waits — for inspiration to unveil itself. Such savoir faire can unnerve his competitors. “Great art doesn’t come from an artist’s mind,” he said. “I think it come from an ethereal nothingness that’s out there. I never would have come up with that piece that won (at the World Championship). I’m not smart enough to do that. I always get complaints by my fellow competitors because they say ‘you don’t do anything for three hours, and you just walk around your piece.’ I can’t come up with something beforehand because I don’t have any connection to it. Once you’re out there shoveling the sand, things start happening in your head, you

begin to focus on maybe one idea, and as you work, the lines begin to develop. It expands and takes on its own nature and the idea of the artist is to follow that nature. ”

Not one to rest on his laurels, Mr. Jara will aim high at this year’s event.

“I’m up against people I feel, many times, are far superior,” he said. “And their ideas keep expanding and so I have to keep expanding so I can stay ahead of them.

“I want something that could be put in a museum. I want something that will inspire people when they walk up to it. An art teacher told me once, ‘Good art is something that’s beautiful enough to look at long enough to figure it out.’ It has to be beautiful in some respect. It can be ugly, but it has to be intentionally ugly. In that ugliness, it has to be beautiful. It has to say something. It can’t just be nothing. For me, sandsculpting is a way to figure out conflicts in my own head or express an emotion or to express something about the human condition.”

Sadly, or so it seems, that expression will fade back into the beach in the weeks to come. But Mr. Jara isn’t bothered by the temporary nature of his work. The true artistry of sandsculpting, he says, is in the performance. And anyway, he doesn’t have to worry about succumbing to the same fate as of one of his favorite artists, Vincent Van Gogh, who is reported to have sold a single painting in his lifetime, a few months before he died at age 37.

“I always find that really disturbing that someone could create something so freaking amazing and nobody would buy it,” Mr. Jara said. “Whereas with sand, it’s absolutely beautiful because I’m not selling them my piece of art, I’m selling them on my talents while I’m there, like a plumber.”

To him, witnessing the creation is more exciting than the finished product.

“Van Gogh didn’t sit down and say ‘I’m going to paint a picture of a swirly sky.’ He developed it as he went,” Mr. Jara said. “With sand sculpture, anybody can come out and watch us work. They can see that moment, that creation occurring right before them. It’s very much like a



COURTESY PHOTO  
Carl Jara with his winning sculpture from the latest World Championship of Sandsculpting in 2008, “What Lies Beneath.”



dance or a symphony. It’s meant to be experienced in its entirety. You’d be amazed: you put a piece in the mall and you work on a mundane little detail and people will sit there for hours watching. But when it’s finished, it’s just finished. When it’s being worked on, it’s magic.”

Ms. Fralich sees sandsculpting as “a sport and an art.”

“I hope my style will grow and expand,” she said. “I think my style (leans) towards the whimsical, the cute, the fantasy fairy-tale dragon realm. Everywhere, anything and everything can inspire me to do a sculpture.”

Timeline

The sculptors began arriving on Tuesday. Starting Thursday at 9 a.m., all the competitors will join together to finish a group project: a sea-themed cornucopia, including a giant conch shell overflowing with sand dollars, sea creatures and giant tropical flow-ers. If you want to meet them, Thurs-day is the day to go.

“There’s a lot to see that day,” Ms. Corning said. “It’s not part of the competition so it’s kind of casual. It’s a great time for people who actually want to talk to the sculptors. We’re more than willing to put our tools down, sign autographs.”

The master’s competition begins Friday at 9 a.m. The first four or five hours, called the “pound up” or “pounding up” — when tons of sand are shoveled into molds and mixed with water — includes some of the most physically intense labor. The day ends at 6 p.m.

By Saturday the carving is well under way.

“For people who appreciate the per-formance art and really appreciate the techniques, Saturday’s a good day,” Ms. Corning said.

And for those who want “the most visual bang for their buck,” Sunday is a must-see. It starts at 8 a.m.

“The last hour, there’s a real energy in the air because you’ve got all these artists trying to finish on time and the site crews cleaning up,” Ms. Corning said. At 1 p.m., the show is over. The crowd will get to see the sculptors finish, and even vote on them for a “people’s choice award” open until 4 p.m. Voting for your favorite sculp-tor costs 25 cents and you can vote as many times as you want.

On Sunday evening at 6 p.m. at the Holiday Inn, there will be an awards ceremony. First place prize is \$1,500; second, \$1,250; third, \$1,000; fourth, \$750; and fifth, \$500.

There is also a smaller group of sculptors working below the master level, the Florida State Championship Competition, which starts Saturday. Their competition ends Sunday at 2 p.m. There will also be amateur sand sculptors at the event. ■



COURTESY PHOTOS

Above: Peter Vogelaar from Brit-ish Columbia, Canada, with one of his sculptures, a winner at the North American Championship in 2009

Right: Jeff Strong from Tacoma, Wash., with one of his sculptures.

Below: Lucinda “Sandy Feet” Wi-erenga from South Padre Island, Texas, with one of her sculptures.

Bottom left: A sculpture called “Mirror” by Sue McGrew from Tacoma, Wash., the winning piece at the 2009 New England Championship 2009.

Bottom right: A sculpture by Katie Corning from Fort Myers Beach, site manager for this year’s Sandsculpting Festival (not one of the competitors).



if you go

>> **What:** 23rd annual American Sandsculpting Championship Festival.

>> **When:** Nov. 3 – 8

>> **Where:** In front of the Holiday Inn to the south and in front of Gullwing Beach Resort or Point Estero Beach Resort a few hundred yards north. The Master Carve Competition starts Friday at 9 a.m. and ends Sunday at 1 p.m.

>> **Cost:** \$3 for children and seniors, \$5 adults, maximum charge of \$10 for families.

>> **Details:** Event organizers recommend using Bonita Beach Road instead of Matanzas Pass Bridge, or one of the trolleys depart-ing from Lovers Key State Park or Summerlin Square Plaza to avoid long lines.

>> **For more information:** Call 334-7001 or go to [www.sandsculptingfestival.com](http://www.sandsculptingfestival.com)



# CYCLING

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marking lanes won't keep cyclists safer and will promote a false sense of security. Even so, Lee County commissioners are set this month to consider legislation that might require things like signs, such as those that ask motorists to "share the road," and other measures to make the county more bicycle friendly.

Maybe people would see more bicyclists out riding around, suggests Dan Moser, program manager for the Florida Bicycle Association, if county and city officials didn't treat them like "second-class citizens." Lee DOT currently follows the minimum requirements imposed by state guidelines, which don't require white lines or signage indicating a bicyclist is welcome.

Bill Nesper, director of the Bicycle Friendly America Program for the League of American Bicyclists, based in Washington, D.C., agrees with Mr. Moser.

"I think it's important to bring up that one-third of our population doesn't drive," he said.

Lee County's Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee applied this year to Mr. Nesper's organization, hoping to officially be approved as a Bicycle Friendly Community. But Lee County failed to achieve even the lowest level of friendliness. Only about one-third of the communities that apply qualify as a Bicycle Friendly Community.

"It didn't even get the lowest grade," said Mr. Moser. "It just confirmed what we all know, that we have a piss-poor bicycling environment."

Mr. Nesper wouldn't reveal where Lee County fell short. There are five categories considered — engineering, education, encouragement, enforcement and evaluation.

The lack of marked bicycle lanes may have hurt the county's chances. On Alico Road, for example, bicycle signs painted on the asphalt were blacked out. Steps like that could be construed as hostile to bicyclists, not friendly.

Mr. Nester suggested that retirees in Lee County and others would be out bicycling more if they were encouraged to do so. He cited a 2008 study by Rutgers University Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, which found that people 65 and older in the Netherlands, Denmark and Germany made more bicycle trips than any other age group except teenagers.

"It's not that the Dutch are born with some gene that makes them able to ride longer," he said. "They made real decisions to accommodate (bicyclists). And it's not a bunch of extra money. We're talking about simple things like putting up signage, putting up paint to let cyclists know they're allowed to be here, running public service announcements. Things like that don't cost a lot of extra money."

Lee County commissioners will discuss these and other plans starting this month as they follow the lead of federal legislation called The Complete Streets Act. It hasn't been voted on yet, but aims to create a "comprehensive, integrated, and connected network for all modes of transportation."

The commissioners hope to make Lee County "a complete streets county," when it comes to integrating walking and bicycling into our car-centric culture. But they've got a long way to go — and will need the compliance of cities like Cape Coral and Fort Myers. "Mean Streets" reports from a Washington, D.C.-based group consistently rank the Fort Myers-Cape Coral metropolitan area as one of the deadliest in the nation for pedestrians.

BikeWalk Lee, a local advocacy group that promotes Complete Street legislation, is hosting a public meeting in Lakes Park

Sunday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., called "Turning Lee County's Mean Streets into Complete Streets." Participants will trade ideas, comments and criticism from all sides of the issue. Lunch will be served.

## Safety and respect

Older roads in Lee County weren't designed to accommodate bicycles at all. By the 1980s, a road was considered a "bicycle lane" if the outside lanes were simply wider than the standard lane width, said Andy Getch, Lee DOT senior engineer.

Lee County transportation planners stick by state guidelines, The Florida Greenbook, to guide their choices on how to accommodate bicyclists. The Greenbook lists both requirements and recommendations for bicycle lanes. And so far, Lee County has stuck with the requirements.

"Signing and marking bicycle lanes still falls into the 'should' category," Mr. Getch said.

Adding stripes and signs to shoulders also promotes a false sense of security, Mr. Wingard said.

"The bicyclist then has a certain perception that because they are in a bike lane that it gives them some protection against an automobile," he said. "But it gives them nothing. There's a white line (separating the cars from the bicyclists). I guess that's one of the reasons we've been a little bit hesitant to do anything."

Steve Jansen, Lee DOT's senior traffic engineer, agreed.

"Studies that I have seen have not shown that a marked bike lane is particularly safer than an unmarked bike lane," he said. "For bicycle safety probably the biggest thing that needs to be done is to educate bicyclists and drivers on sharing the roadway safely."

Mr. Moser insists signs and stripes, as well as building other infrastructure, don't cost as much as DOT leaders imply, if planned selectively. He argues that signs

and stripes do keep bicyclists safer, provided they are also educated on safely sharing the roadway with motorists.

"There's little excuse (for a bicyclists to ride the wrong way on a road) if you're in a lane and there's an arrow pointing in the other direction," he said. "There are these subtle things that make bike lanes safer."

And, he adds, this is about more than just safety. Like Rodney Dangerfield, bicyclists want some respect.

"A lot of it is symbolic," Mr. Moser said. "It's asking people to take (bicyclists and pedestrians) seriously. We're telling motorists, 'you're the king,' and everybody else is kind of second class."

Mr. Wingard might agree with that. "America is stuck in the automobile," he said. "We just have a fixation on driving our cars."

The political pressure in favor of motorists are hard to ignore, but there is also increasing pressure to accommodate new modes of transportation. While some measures like signing and striping might be low cost enough to get approval from commissioners, building new bicycle lanes could be a tougher sell.

"Anywhere you add pavement it costs to resurface later on, it costs to white it later on," said Don Scott, director of Lee Metropolitan Planning Organization. ■

if you go

**>> What:** "Turning Lee County's Mean Streets into Complete Streets"  
**>> Where:** Lakes Park in South Fort Myers  
**>> When:** 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 8.  
**>> Details:** Drop in and share thoughts, complaints, suggestions and offers of assistance. Bike Walk Lee will supply maps, surveys and other tools for documenting ideas. Complimentary food and beverages will be provided to those who participate and volunteer.



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