

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 flowers. If you want to meet them, Thursday 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 performance 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 sculptor 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 British 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" Wierenga 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 departing 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

