

THE TIDES OF TRADITION

53 years of Cannon Beach Sandcastle Contest knowledge helps organizer Debbie Nelson prep for 2017 event

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FOR COAST WEEKEND

The Cannon Beach Sandcastle Contest has seen many changes in its 53 years. Some of these changes are seen in the number of people, the competitors, and, of course, the sandcastles themselves. But this tradition has one element that no tide can wash away: Debbie Nelson, the chairwoman of the Sandcastle planning committee. Nelson has been the chairwoman for the past seven years, as well as a participant, judge or event organizer every year since the contest began in 1964.

"I have decades' worth of Sandcastle shirts at

my house," Nelson said, laughing.

About 15,000 master artists, amateurs and spectators are expected to come to this year's Sandcastle celebrations Friday through Sunday, June 16 through 18. Regular festivities, like the sandcastle building contest, parade and 5K fun run and walk, are all returning.

This time it will all happen in a special context: the 50th anniversary of the Oregon Beach Bill. There will be information at the event this year for visitors interested in learning more about the bill that passed in 1967 and declared the Oregon Coast open to the public.

"It's because of this bill that we can continue to do this," Nelson said.

Shortly after the bill's passage, Nelson remembers going to the first Sandcastle Contest when she was 4 — the year after a tsunami hit the North Coast.

She remembers first festivities being small and mostly local.

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