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BRENNA VISSER

Debbie Nelson holds a sandcastle-shaped candle to show her enthusiasm for this year's Cannon Beach Sandcastle Contest. She has been the chair of the Sandcastle Committee for seven years.

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"The town didn't really advertise," she said. "It was to help quell fears after the tidal wave."

Cannon Beach Mayor Sam Steidel also remembers participating in the early days of the festival, when most contestants were kids and families rather than world-class artists.

"Families would get plots next to each other, and then help each other out with each other's creations," he said.

Ebbing and flowing

Now, the contest has become the oldest west of the Mississippi River, attracting up to 30,000 people and some of the world's most competitive sandcastle makers.

Steidel — who, like Nelson, is a lifelong Cannon Beach resident — has served in roles similar to Nelson's over many years. As a judge, participant and event organizer, he said he noticed the cultural vibe ebb and flow. After master artists started taking more interest in the contest in the mid-1990s, he said



PHOTO BY GEORGE VETTER

A row of sandcastles at a previous contest



SUBMITTED PHOTO

helped judge, facilitate plots for competitors, and organize the dozens of volunteers it takes to pull off the events.

"I really love the camaraderie of getting the job done. It's such a satisfying moment," she said. "I've lived here all my life. It's a lot of work, but it's a way to represent hometown tradition, and I've decided (the Sandcastle Contest) is the tradition I've decided to put my time into."

This year's contest will begin 10 a.m. Saturday, June 17. For more information on the contest, contact the Cannon Beach Chamber of Commerce at 503-436-2623.

the level of competition started to rise, taking away some of that iconic family feel.

"I think Debbie's engagement with the town and leadership has helped make it feel like a hometown event again," he said. For Nelson, that passion comes from a place of protecting the feeling of a hometown tradition.

In her lifetime, she has

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