

# Sandcastle contest a legacy despite unclear origins

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That night, a folk music concert featuring several local musicians will be held at 7 p.m. at the Community Hall.

Then, at 8 p.m., a beach bonfire will be held at the Tolovana Wayside. S'mores will be served, but attendees must bring their own chairs.

Finally, a 5K Fun Run takes off from the beach at Second Street at 9 a.m. June 21; registration begins at 8 a.m.

For more information, visit [www.cannonbeach.org/businesses/SandcastleContest](http://www.cannonbeach.org/businesses/SandcastleContest).

## '64 or '65?

Confusion has cropped up lately among some locals regarding the origins of Cannon Beach's Sandcastle Contest, which received the Oregon Heritage Tradition award from the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department last year.

That last year's Sandcastle Contest was variously billed at the "50th Sandcastle Contest," the "50th annual Sandcastle Contest" and the "50th anniversary" of the first contest doesn't help matters (though, to be sure, any of those distinctions qualifies the contest for the heritage tradition award).

The orthodox narrative pins the first sandcastle-type event in 1964, the year of the Good Friday Quake — a 9.2 megaquake in early spring that originated in Alaska and sent tsunami waves crashing along Pacific Northwest shores.

However, the Library of Congress states that the event began in 1965 "as a promotional event for this small Oregon coastal town." Furthermore, the *Seaside Signal* archives from summer 1965 advertise the "1st annual Sand Castle and Sculpture Contest," which took place July 29 that year.

So what happened here?

## Origin story

In the wake of the earthquake and tsunami, which

occurred on March 27, 1964, Cannon Beach became a ghost town.

The wall of water and the debris it pushed up Ecola Creek knocked out the Ecola Creek Bridge, eliminating Cannon Beach's north entrance. The incident sparked a "mass exodus"; many residents sold their property and left Cannon Beach for good, according to Elaine Murdy-Trucke, executive director of the Cannon Beach History Center & Museum.

That summer, a group of locals formed a sandcastle event held in August, according to documents submitted to the state Parks and Recreation Department.

"The intention was to kind of boost the morale of the community and to show that the beach is not a scary place, that it is safe to come," Murdy-Trucke said.

That first sandcastle event — which is not terrifically well documented — was a relatively rinky-dink affair, mostly concocted as a lark for the children, many of whom came dressed in costumes, she and other sources said.

"It was mainly a community event that year," she said.

Murdy-Trucke added that, like today, the event included a parade, though it definitely did not include master sand sculptors and high-stakes judging.

So a sandcastle event of some sort almost certainly happened in 1964. On this point, Bill Steidel, Peter Lindsey and Billie Atherton — three people who were either involved in the event or were around at the time — all agree.

## 'Annual' vs. 'anniversary'

Because the first event, in 1964, was planned as a one-off, it wasn't designated "first annual" because there was nothing annual about it yet. But, on the basis of that experience, the town decided to make it an annual event



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Cannon Beach will host its annual Sandcastle Contest Saturday, June 20, the oldest competition of its kind in the Pacific Northwest and the most popular event. Dozens of teams of professional sand sculpture artists, amateur groups and families will construct remarkable creations in the sand during the event which will celebrate its 51st year in 2015.

the following year, complete with judging categories and cash prizes.

This means that the "first annual" Sandcastle Contest, as publicized in the *Seaside Signal*, was, in fact, the second contest, that the "second annual" contest was the third contest, and so on.

"The first one was not the first one," said Treva Haskell, who co-founded Bruce's Candy Kitchen in Cannon Beach in 1963.

So — if one starts counting from 1964, as tradition dictates — the 2014 celebration marked both the "50th annual" event and, yes, 50th anniversary of the first event. But it was actually the 51st consecutive contest, not the 50th Sandcastle Contest — unless one starts the clock in 1965, when it officially became "annual." This year, then, marks the "51st annual" event but the 52nd consecutive event.

## Lasting legacy

Historical hair-splitting aside, one thing appears beyond dispute: The Good Friday Quake, a formative

event that could have destroyed Cannon Beach, ended up revitalizing it. By creating the Sandcastle Contest, the locals used the traumatic

episode to their advantage, purposefully founding a legacy defined by opportunity rather than tragedy.

And the estimated 15,000

to 20,000 visitors that drove to Cannon Beach specifically for the Sandcastle Contest last year prove that the legacy endures.

## SCHEDULE FOR 2015 SANDCASTLE EVENTS

Now more than a 50-year tradition in Cannon Beach, the community's annual Sandcastle Contest draws thousands of spectators who view the monumental, but temporary, sculptures by teams of professional "masters" and amateur sand artists.

The 51st annual Cannon Beach Sandcastle Contest will draw thousands of onlookers beginning Friday, June 19 at 5:30 p.m., and the weekend includes a series of other related events that typically make this the busiest weekend of the year in this small beach town. Additional events planned for 2015 include a parade, a folk music concert and a fun run and walk. The Sandcastle Contest awards will be announced Saturday at 12:30 p.m. on the beach, making 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. the best time for viewing the completed sculptures.

The Cannon Beach Sandcastle Contest was recognized as an Oregon Heritage Tradition by Oregon State Parks last year when the event celebrated its 50th anniversary, making it one of just 11 events statewide to achieve such a designation. The contest was founded in 1964 following an earthquake in Alaska that created a tsunami, which washed

out the Ecola Creek bridge and flooded the downtown area. Local residents got together that summer to put on a community sandcastle contest to raise spirits and draw visitors back to Cannon Beach. The event grew and, more than 50 years later, the Sandcastle Contest weekend is still the busiest weekend of the year for Cannon Beach.

Make lodging reservations early for this popular weekend as hotels typically sell out all rooms in advance. Day-trippers should plan on arriving early. The Sandcastle Contest is the only day of each year when the beach is used for parking to accommodate the large crowds. For information on the Cannon Beach Sandcastle Contest or to find lodging, visit [www.cannonbeach.org](http://www.cannonbeach.org) or call the Cannon Beach Chamber of Commerce at (503) 436-2623.

Online registration for all sandcastle-building teams is also now open. Divisions available are Masters, Open, Teen, Junior and Sand Fleas. Visitors can also sign up online in advance for the Shovel and Bucket Dinner or 5K Fun Run/Walk, as well as purchase Sandcastle T-shirts and commemorative posters.



## Hats off to the Class of 2015

Graduation is \_\_\_\_\_  
 a time of joy,  
 a time of great pride,  
 a time of looking back at past achievements,  
 and a time of looking forward to new beginnings.

Congratulations and many blessings to the Class of 2015.

