

FINDING FRIENDS ON THE COURT

Seaside Beach Volleyball tournament enters 36th year

By Brenna Visser
Cannon Beach Gazette

When Joel Maag first started playing in the Seaside Beach Volleyball tournament, the conversations he would have with his friends after a match would revolve what they planned to do that weekend.

Now, 25 years later, Maag and those same friends still play together in the tournament. But the conversation has shifted from weekend plans to bonding over their kids, their families and their full-time jobs.

“Today, almost all of us have kids. And maybe we aren’t as athletic as we all once were, but it is still great we are playing today,” Maag said. “Between reminiscing about the old days, to experiencing this with our kids today, it has been fun to watch that transition.”

Like the 25 years before, the Portland resident will return to play in the Seaside Beach Volleyball tournament Aug. 10-13. He will be on one of the 1,400 teams estimated to register this year, equating to almost 3,000 vol-



PHOTO BY JEFF TER HAR



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Joel Maag, center, with his sons, Quin, 11, and Sullivan, 14.

leyball enthusiasts crowding the soft sands of Seaside.

Skill sets vary from casual play to the open division, where world-renowned players compete in the center court for a first-place, \$4,000 cash prize and prestige.

In its 36th year, the tournament includes players of all ages and has been recognized as the world’s largest amateur volleyball tournament. Many of the aspects of the tournament will remain the same, but this year youth division will be guaranteed to play at least two days in

a row, according to Seaside Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Brian Owen.

“These divisions used to be single eliminations, but we wanted to make sure that we were creating a positive traveling experience for these families who are coming from all over the country to participate,” Owen said.

While the minutiae of game logistics vary from year to year, over three decades what remains constant is the feeling of excitement that builds throughout the weekend, culminating Satur-

day when open players battle for first place.

“I thrive on that environment myself as an extrovert,” Maag said. “There’s so much magic involved with meeting new people and playing alongside such talented players.”

Maag didn’t start playing volleyball until college. At University of Portland, he joined a club team and immediately fell in love with the sport, he said.

In that circuit he heard about Seaside’s tournament, and after attending one de-

cided he “didn’t want to be missing any of these.”

Maag started playing in the 8-player division, eventually worked up the open division and now competes in what he calls the “dinosaur division” — more cordially known as golden masters for people over 45.

But as his volleyball career has progressed, competition is balanced with making memories with his kids and his friends.

“For me it’s a vacation. I’m still competitive and want to do well, but a lot of

the people we’ve playing with and against have been playing for 20 years. We get to carry on that relationship,” he said.

While Maag has found many reasons to return each year, Owen said what makes this event special for some is just the opportunity to get to play beach volleyball in the first place.

“I enjoy watching the kids get an opportunity to play. Not all players get to have regular beach access, so that is opportunity, too,” Owen said.



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