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Sea Bean enthusiasts wash up in Brevard

Annual event set for Oct. 13-14

BY KING QUILLEN
FOR FLORIDA TODAY

Drifters and other beach enthusiasts will surge into the Cocoa Beach Public Library Oct. 13 and 14 during the 11th annual Sea Bean Symposium and Beachcombers' Festival.

They will show off beach treasures, listen to scientific experts and -- most important -- share the hobby that entralls them.

"They have a great enthusiasm, almost childlike," said Ray Dickinson, director of the Cocoa Beach Library. "These are people who don't pass by things. They notice everything, wonder about it and find out about it. It rubs off on you."

It has rubbed off on many people since a group of 20 gathered for the first symposium in 1996. Last year's symposium drew more than 1,000 people.

Drifters who attend have backgrounds as varied as the sea beans they prize. They include artists, teachers, surfers and scientists, but they are united by a passion for objects that drift through the oceans.

"It's the mystery and the wonder of it," said Margie Mitchell of Cocoa Beach, a symposium organizer. "The mystery of finding something on the beach and tracking it down. What is it? Where did it come from? How did it get here?"

The short answer is that sea beans are seeds from trees and vines that grow in tropical

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Collector. Margie Mitchell not only collects sea beans along the Cocoa Beach shore, she brings along a bag with interesting sea beans that she gives away to encourage people to search for sea beans of their own. King Quillen, for FLORIDA TODAY

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At a glance

Sea beans of all kinds will be on display in a variety of guises at the 11th annual Sea Bean Symposium and Beachcombers' Festival.

forests or along coastlines. They drop from pods and are washed into the ocean.

The hardy ones drift along, buoyed by air pockets inside their shells until they wash up on distant shores.

Drifters -- the human variety -- study the journeys. They chart the currents that propel the beans and test how long each variety can stay afloat.

And they prowl the wrack lines along beaches in Florida and around the world, searching for sea beans in bands of seaweed and debris.

"It gives me a reason to travel around the world," said Nan Rhodes of Satellite Beach, who spent September on Australian beaches, collecting sea beans for the jewelry she crafts.

Drifters share their finds and identify rare beans through Web sites such as www.seabean.com and publications like *The Drifting Seed*, edited and published by Melbourne resident Ed Perry, who heads the symposium.

"It's a human necessity to share what we find and the things we revel in with each other," Perry said. "These are things we're fascinated with and need to understand."

Perry's fascination began almost 30 years ago when his grandmother, Helen Risler, sent him to the beach to renew her supply of hamburger beans. She operated the Sea Bean Boutique at the Cocoa Beach landmark then known as the Canaveral Pier.

"People would ask 'What's a sea bean?' and she'd pull out a hamburger bean and show them and give it away," Perry said.

Drifters still give away sea beans. They also explain why beans have names such as hamburger and sea heart. And they recite bean lore, explaining what beans ward off evil eye and which ones ease childbirth pains.

But the symposium is about more than promoting a hobby.

"It's an educational outreach," Mitchell said. "We want people to be interested in the world of the ocean and the beach, understand the value of the natural world and get involved in protecting and caring about it."

And, she added with a grin, "It's really fun."

There will be beans fresh from the beach and beans that have been polished, made into jewelry, photographed, painted, sprouted and cataloged in books.

Other programs also are scheduled, including: **Oct. 13:**

- 11 a.m. -- Beginners' beachwalking slide show by Ed Perry, ranger at Sebastian Inlet State Park
- 2 p.m. -- "What's Floating in Our Oceans Now?" slide show by Seattle oceanographer Curtis Ebbesmeyer. **Oct. 14:**
- 8 to 10 a.m. -- Bean-a-thon. Search any beach from Canaveral National Seashore to Sebastian Inlet for beans and other treasures. Prizes awarded for best items in categories such as oddest bean, largest hamburger bean and best nonbean.
- 4 p.m. -- Bean polishing demonstration
- 7 p.m. -- Prizes and drawings
- 7:45 p.m. -- Keynote address: "Beachcombing the West Coast from A to Z" by Alan Rammer, marine community outreach and environmental education specialist with the Washington state Department of Fish and Wildlife. **If you go What:** Sea Bean Symposium and Beachcombers' Festival **When:** 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Oct. 13; 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Oct. 14. **Where:** Cocoa Beach Public Library, 550 N. Brevard Ave. Call 868-1104.

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