

Beachcomber's collection of treasures is 'shovel-ready'

By JOELLE CARR
For the Star and Wave

MARSHALLVILLE — Thousands of tourists discard plastic waste or leave behind cheap toys after a trip to the beach, where if left untouched they will wash into the ocean.

But these forgotten toys and trash stand little chance against beachcomber Gay LeCleire Taylor.

She walks the beaches of Corson's Inlet State Park in search of buckets, beach toys and, most importantly, shovels. They go straight into her collection, which now numbers 483 colorful digging tools.

LeCleire Taylor grew up in Wallingford, Pa., but has strong ties to Ocean City. Her mother grew up on the island, graduating from Ocean City High School, and her parents had a second home in the Gardens neighborhood. Her aunt taught biology at OCHS for 30



David Nahan/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

Gay LeCleire Taylor has the plastic shovels she has collected from beaches in varying displays in her Marshallville, Upper Township home. She has fashioned some into art combinations in their own right, right, and others brighten up the garage, above.

years before she retired in 1970. LeCleire Taylor

said the island was "a second home" for her, where she would spend weekends and summers by the beach.

She said her family always walked and cleaned the beach during their stays. Of all of the items she found, one in particular caught her fancy.

LeCleire Taylor said she does not know what drew her to the shovels, but she remembers one of the first ones she picked up was from Gay Toys Inc. and she thought it was humorous that they shared a name.

"I threw out the trash.



If there were other plastic toys, I put them in a bin. And over the years, my husband and I have cleaned them up and given them to the Goodwill shops at the shore so they could sell them to kids or families ... I still just kept the shovels for some reason," LeCleire Taylor said.

For more than 30 years, she worked as a director

and curator for the Museum of American Glass at the Wheaton Arts and Cultural Center in Millville. After her retirement in 2009, she started making the commute to walk the beach.

"I collect driftwood, I collect shells. I make driftwood reeves; I make shell mirrors and shell frames ... somehow the shovels caught my eye.

I don't know why," she said.

Being a museum curator, she started to document the companies that made the shovels. She keeps a chalkboard to count the number of whole shovels she has collected since her retirement.

People also give her shovels that they have found on the beach, and though she takes them, they are never included in her count. She has personally collected the 483 shovels in her collection since her retirement. Skipping the island's busy season, LeCleire Taylor, who lives in Marshallville in Upper Township, walks the beach only in the off-season, from late fall to spring. She is fond of being the only person on the beach, which is the case during her late winter walks; when snow is falling, she normally has the beach all to herself.

Corson's Inlet State Park is her beach of choice to walk and collect. She does haphazardly walk the beaches by the Gardens or up toward the Northend bridge, but "the bulk have all been from

See Beachcomber, page A5

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Good News Bible 10:7,8

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