Beachcomber’s collection of treasures is ‘shovel-ready’

By JOELLE CARR
For the Star and Wave

MARSHALLVILLE — Thousands of irritated, discarded plastic waste or broken beach toys and trash stand little chance against beachcomber Gay LeCleire Taylor.

She walks the beaches of Cape May's Island State Park, where she finds broken beach toys and, most importantly, shovels. She goes straight into her collection, which now numbers 483 colorful digging tools. LeCleire Taylor grew up on Wallfard Ave., but has always been a beach girl. She graduated from Millville High School, and her parents had a second home in the Gardens neighborhood. Her aunt taught biology at OCHS for 30 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.

When her family all stayed away 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 began to document them. One day she was walking by the beach and first saw one of Gay Toys Inc. shovels. She was from Gay Toys Inc. and she wondered if she should sell them to kids. She said, “I put them in a bin. And over the years, if there were other plastic tools, 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 as they could sell them to their fans. It was just keeping the shovels for some other purpose.”

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. She collected shovels, I made driftwood 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 child’s cardboard to count the number of white 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 she has in her collection now.

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 during that time, since she will trust the island to the last winter walker, when everyone is falling, she normally has her beach all to her self.

Corson’s Inlet State Park is her beach of choice to walk and collect. She does her best not to walk the beaches by the Northend bridge, but “the bulk have all found from the 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. 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.

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