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Artist exhibits sea bean jewelry

Exotic locales offer materials

BY KING QUILLEN
FOR FLORIDA TODAY

Nan Rhodes calls herself a drifter, but the description refers to her art and her spirit of adventure rather than any lack of direction.

"Drifter" is a term adopted by people who search for sea beans that are stranded on beaches. The beans, also called drift seeds, drop from tropical vines and trees, are swept out to sea and float away to distant shores.

Rhodes, a Satellite Beach graphic artist, crafts the sea beans into unique jewelry. She turns one variety into an exotic potted plant. And she finds adventure looking for the beans in places like Australia and the Abaco Islands.

"I'm a drifter because I could be packed and ready to go in five minutes," Rhodes said. "I like the whole atmosphere of going out and looking for beans, going to different places, different scenery, different oceans."

She began drifting toward her bean adventures 30 years ago. Employed as a graphic artist in Washington, D.C., she broke an ankle during a Florida vacation. Recuperation led to reflection. The result was a new home and job in Fort Lauderdale.

Walking along a beach in Cornwall, England, a few years later, she was intrigued to find a sea heart that resembled seeds found on Fort Lauderdale beaches.

"That clinched it. I said 'These things travel a long way. They're liable to end up anywhere,'" Rhodes said.

Back home, she became an avid bean collector and licensed mangrove grower and sold potted red mangroves and simple sea bean necklaces at a weekend market.

Three years ago, she discovered the annual Cocoa Beach Sea Bean Symposium. Ed Perry, its organizer, helped her identify beans she'd found in faraway locations. She learned to polish the beans so her works had a lustrous gleam.

"Her jewelry is just beautiful," Perry said. "She's good at everything she does. She has the ability and strength and know-how to take off and do anything in this world by herself and do

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On display. Nan Rhodes crafts sea bean jewelry using drift seeds. She also grows another sea bean, red mangrove propagules, into potted plants. Her creations are on display through April at the Cocoa Beach Public Library. King Quillen, for FLORIDA TODAY

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Two years ago, Rhodes moved her graphic arts business and her sea bean operations to Brevard County. From here, she flies off on expeditions that can yield as much as 60 pounds of jewelry materials.

Rhodes spends up to four months preparing a batch of beans using a bench grinder and tumblers filled first with sand, then ground walnut shells and polishing compound. She crafts them into pieces sold locally and online. Prices range from earrings at \$7 and necklaces beginning at \$25 to rosaries for \$125.

Check it out

Nan Rhodes' sea bean jewelry will be on display through the end of the month at the Cocoa Beach Public Library, 550 N. Brevard Ave.

Her jewelry and potted mangroves also can be seen from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sunday, April 29, at the Cocoa Beach Farmers' Market, behind City Hall on Brevard Avenue.

Learn more about her mangrove plants at www.mangrovemania.com and her jewelry at www.beachbeans.com

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