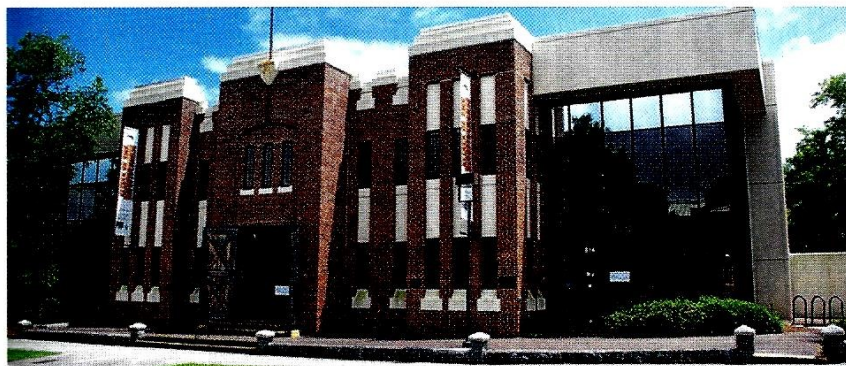


# Citizen scientists converge on Wilmington, North Carolina

John Timmerman, Chair North Carolina Shell Show



Cape Fear Museum in Wilmington North Carolina hosted the 41<sup>st</sup> North Carolina Shell Show on September 17-18, 2016. The show featured exhibits by citizen scientists hailing from Florida, Kentucky, Kansas, New Jersey, and many points in between. Over 380 feet of high quality scientific exhibits and artwork graced the show.

One goal of the Shell Show committee is advertising the show. Billboards were designed for the show by our hosting institution. I had several promotional interviews including one by Gina Gambony for “Communique” a locally produced feature which airs on the National Public Radio affiliate WHQR, 91.3 FM. One of our exhibitors, Phyllis Gray, heard the interview when she was in town for the show and suggested that the transcript be shared with the “American Conchologists” readers.

*This interview between John Timmerman (North Carolina Shell Club) and Gina Gambony (WHQR) aired on WHQR Public Radio on September 17, 2016. The audio, plus an additional segment about an exhibit by Timmerman, is available at [WHQR.org](http://WHQR.org).*

Gina (GG), inquired as to how many shells could be expected to be on view at the North Carolina Shell Show and John (JT), answered;

JT: I can’t give an exact number. I think a safe bet would be tens of thousands.

GG: That’s tens of thousands of shells he’s talking about. The kind from the ocean. John Timmerman from the North Carolina Shell Club has loved sea shells since he was a child. He’s the chair of the shell show exhibit at the Cape Fear Museum just this weekend. Here’s more from John Timmerman about shells.

JT: North Carolina was the first really exciting shelling that I did when I was a child. My parents discovered Ocracoke back when it was much more ‘wildernessy’ than it is today. It was the mid ‘60s. The Bonner Bridge was brand new. The village had rolling black-outs back then, but the shelling was unbelievable.

GG: What can people expect to see in the Shell Show?

JT: The Shell Show is an interesting animal in that exhibitors from all over

the country bring prepared exhibits about any theme they desire to profile. For instance, we have a lady coming from Kansas with an exhibit of shells from New Zealand. We have another man who has traveled the world his whole life. He’s from Kentucky, bringing an exhibit of all the places he’s gone over the world. We have a local man who goes to all the local islands and he’s bringing a big collection of all North Carolina shells that he’s picked up on beaches.

Shell Shows are competitive — we have awards that encourage professional quality. Important to science is keeping track of where the shell came from. If you don’t know where the shell came from, it’s worthless to scientists. Many of these awards are sponsored by institutions that are friends to museums, because amateur collectors are crucial to these museums that just don’t have money to have people in the field all the time. So they encourage us and teach us to be good citizen scientists by these awards. They’re essentially having us produce stuff that they will want in their collections one day.

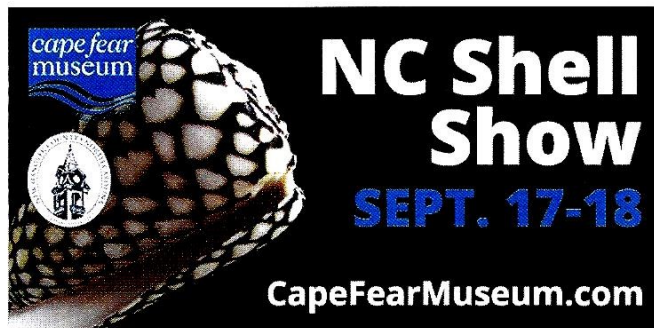
For the public, you don’t have to be into museum quality to really get into the Shell Show. We have all levels of people in the club, from your average weekend warrior that likes picking up pretty shells, to people that can speak enough Latin to put you to sleep. And at the show we have exhibits all the way from that. The man who’s bringing his shells from NC, they’re all shells he’s found strictly on beaches; he doesn’t ever take a live shell. It’s all stuff that if you go to a North Carolina beach, you have a chance of finding. You don’t have to know how to scuba dive and go to great depths offshore to find these shells.

GG: You said that he doesn’t pick up living shells, is there an ethic about that?



JT: There's an ethic that all the shell collectors abide by. Even ones who take live shells, we do it very conservatively. That is to say, when you go to a flat, if you find one of something crawling around, you say well, there aren't a lot of them around here, you turn it loose. If you find a bucket of them, you look through it really carefully and keep one or two and put all the others back where [and] the way [you] found them. For example, if you find a shell under rocks and you decide you don't want it, you don't just toss it back into the water. You go find a rock and let it go under the rock because that's where it's used to living. Because we want to continue this and if you take all the shells you find, pretty soon you're not going to find any shells [be]cause they're all gone.

GG: But no need to worry, thanks to successful shell husbandry, there will be tens of thousands of shells at the shell show just this weekend at the Cape Fear Museum. That was the chair of the show, John Timmerman. Visit WHQR.org to see some of his photos.



**North Carolina Shell Show Billboard, designed and distributed by New Hanover County (North Carolina) Public Affairs.**

This and other publicity efforts did the job. The public arrived in droves. We had people waiting in line to be admitted to the show on both Saturday and Sunday.

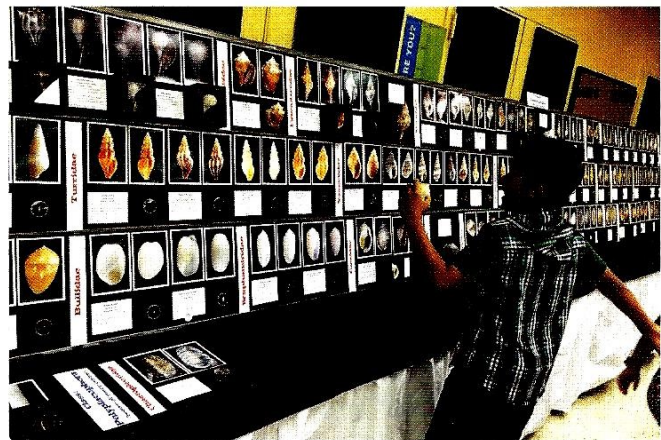
This was the third year of a scavenger hunt, a very popular activity. For the first two years we provided stand-alone clues. This year we embedded the clues within exhibits in the show. People young and old enthusiastically completed the hunt. Upon completion they shared their results with our facilitators who invited them to select a prized shell.

The "People's Choice Award" went by overwhelming majority to Dr. Brady Semmel for his large collection of self-collected North Carolina shells. Brady specializes in collecting only shells that are dead. This has not hindered him in assembling a huge collection of beautifully documented shells displayed with photographic images. His exhibit provided a successful connection to many of our visitors.

Exhibitors contributed displays of shells and art spanning the globe to the pleasure of the public. Gene Everson's immense collection of self-collected shells wowed



**Birthday partygoers show off prized shells after completing the scavenger hunt. The group came to the shell show as a departure from the usual amusement park activity. Photograph by Vicky Wall.**



**"Greetings From the Beaches of North Carolina," by Brady Semmel. A young show attendee uses Brady Semmel's exhibit to identify a shell he just found at the Shell Giveaway. Photograph by Karlynn Morgan.**



**Hand-carved and decorated shell jewelry inspired by traditional Native American designs, made by Bennie Pokemire. Photograph by Karlynn Morgan.**

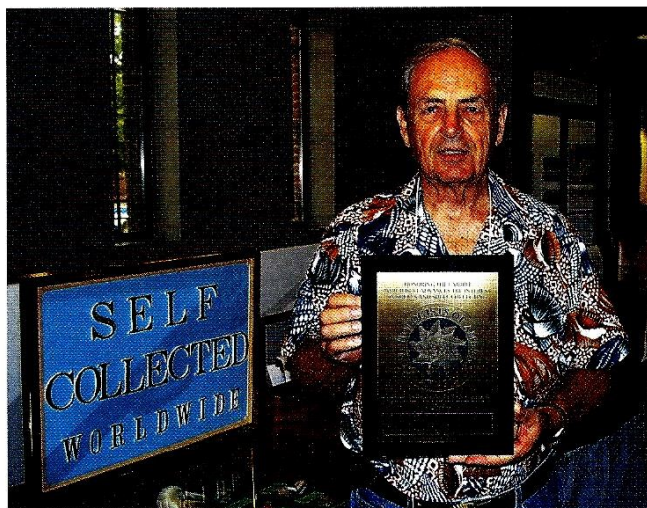


everyone. It was hard for me to pick a favorite, but a *Tutufa bardeyi* (Jousseaume, 1881), stood out as it is a personal favorite and super difficult to obtain from any source! Amy Dick brought a collection of mollusks collected from deep ocean hydrothermal vents providing many of us the first time ever chance to view these unique organisms. Jim and Linda Brunner's exhibit on the Philippine tangle net collecting of shells showed how the shells with the data description "tangle nets" that many of us are familiar with are caught. Karen Couch brought a beautiful exhibit of New Zealand shells, including many I had never seen. Bill Bennight's large collection of self-collected *Spondylus varius* G.B. Sowerby I, 1827, included one valve with a yellow hinge and the other hinge was rose. The shell earned him "Best Self-collected Shell (of The Show)." Doug Wolfe's exhibit of Peter Dance's 50 rare shells included at least one of each of the species profiled in the book, demonstrating Doug's resourceful collecting prowess. Doug's geoduck collection included a huge Mediterranean species contending as one of the largest bivalves in the show. Phyllis Gray shared with us a collection of shells featuring red and gold color. Gregory Curry brought a case of "to die for" fossil *Voluta* from Australia. In addition to his volute fossils, Greg also displayed a modern shell, *Tenebricola cukri* (Rokop, 1972), which earned the title "Best Shell In Show." Ron Hill featured yet another of his shells few of us have ever seen, *Austroharpa loisae* Rehder, 1973, and featured an exhibit profiling his experience at teaching elementary students about shells at a science fair in April 2016. Vicky Wall profiled The Golden Guide "Seashells of the World." Her exhibit touted it as "the best shell book ever published." I am sure many may dispute the claim, but as the first shell book I ever owned it certainly provided many hours of enjoyment and would get my vote. Ed Shuller and Jeannette Tysor profiled malacologists who described shells found in North Carolina. Their display was supported with a large collection of self-collected shells.

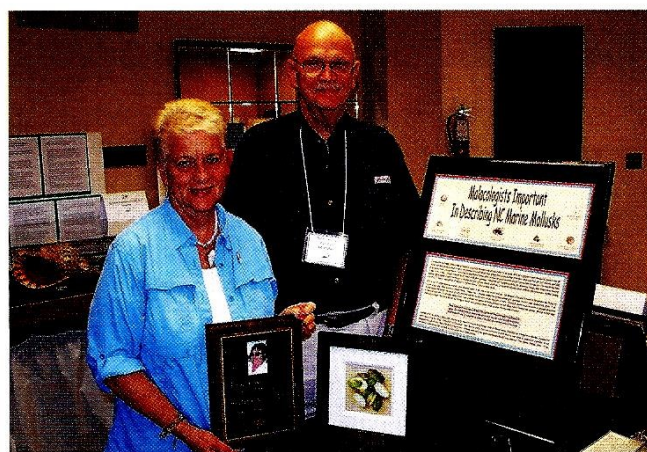
Our artists continue to produce stunning work inspired by the world's shells. Irmgard Cate for a couple years now has said, "This is the last show I will enter..." and then returns. This year she took home the top awards for "Craft Using Shells" for her miniature shell designs using actual pocket watches and the "Sailor's Valentine."

The shell dealers not only provide great opportunities for the collectors to add shells to their collections but are more than willing to share their knowledge with the public about the shell world and information about specific shells. Their gallery is always an exciting destination for the show goers, both newcomers and established experts. It is a "candy store" for shell lovers.

A popular feature of the show for many years is the shell giveaway. Show visitors are invited to select one shell that is their prize from large trays of shells club members and friends of the shell club have donated. Our facilitators help them identify their finds and teach a few things about the shell's natural history. The giveaway provides a taste of the adventure awaiting those who go into the field.



Gene Everson won the COA Award for his display of worldwide self-collected shells. The display took 24 cases spread over 48 feet and contained highlights of Gene's lifetime collecting efforts around the world.



Jeannette Tysor & Ed Shuller were awarded the DuPont Trophy for "Malacologists Important in Describing NC Marine Mollusks." They also won the Alta Van Landingham Trophy for Best Self-Collected Exhibit.

Going into the field, smelling marsh gas, getting one's feet wet, discovering the wonders of nature we call shells, starts many on the road to better understanding the earth's environments in a direct personal sense compared to one that can be abstract if only experienced by reading books or looking at the Internet. The North Carolina Shell Show provides a portal into the adventure in the study of mollusks. It inspires people who take away new energy encouraging the growth of existing and new citizen scientists.

John Timmerman