

DIGGING

sculpting through the sands of time

JANET SCHRADER WAS 5 YEARS OLD when she first began playing on the sandy, freshwater shores of Lake Michigan. Her grandparents belonged to the Prairie Club — officially called Hazelhurst Camp — in Harbert, and it was here she learned to swim and build her first sandcastle.

She had little idea she would become a sand-sculpting artisan and professional.

“I have the best memories growing up playing in and along Lake Michigan. The days were filled with jumping waves and looking for beach treasures,” Janet recalls.

She discovered as a teenager that the beach also was an enjoyable place to watch the sunset with someone special. Her high school sweetheart, Kirk, became her husband in 1984. They bought a house in nearby Lakeside (where they still live) and began their family.

But in 2001, life’s waves crashed down around the 36-year-old mother of two. She was diagnosed with stage 4 non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma. She not only needed to regain her strength after going through chemotherapy but also struggled with depression.

“The more I walked the shore, the better I felt,” Janet says. “I came to some realizations: life is short, and I was going to fill mine with fun. I was going to find something I loved to do that would



Janet Schrader and her husband Kirk demonstrate sand castle building at DeVos place in Grand Rapids.

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— Janet Schrader

beach over the years.”

For more about Janet’s Sand Pirate classes, visit sandpirate.net.

— Dianna Stampfler

make money and enjoy every bit of life I have.”

With that, the Sand Pirate was born. Her job? Helping people rediscover their inner child by digging, stacking, packing and sculpting wet sand into elaborate natural works of art.

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Janet teaches sand-sculpting classes at local schools, corporate events and even has made a sandcastle at Wrigley Field in Chicago during a Cubs baseball game. Her favorite creations include dragons, with smoke bombs in the nose to create a multi-dimensional affect. Mermaids are also popular, along with towering castles.

“We love working with the Sand Pirate,” says Janet Tomecek, who hired Janet to lead sculpting events at private Labor Day weekend parties she hosts. “She has entertained both young and old with her marvelous talents. We have had dragons, mermaids, castles, octopi and Krakens (giant sea monsters) invade our