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KEY BISCAYNE

Architects have a blast at sand-building contest Architecture firms and students competed at an annual sand sculpture contest in Key Biscayne on Saturday.

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For The Miami Herald

If you think a sand sculpture contest must involve buildings and castles, think again.

At the Archipro Sand Blast '06 competition, held Saturday at Key Biscayne's Crandon Park, architects and soon-to-be architects built musical instruments, a life-size alligator, a sunbathing teenager -- anything but the traditional sand castle.

"We wanted something different that nobody else had done," said Lisa Bacelis, 24, a designer with the RTKL firm in South Miami. Her team created a Chinese dragon and won the award for the public's favorite sculpture.

The annual competition brought together six teams of architects from major firms, as well as two from universities and two from high schools, as part of the American Institute of Architects' Celebrate Architecture month. The teams, which had 10 members each, had 3 1/2 hours to create a sand sculpture using water, sand, shovels, pails and little else.

'At first you see a pile of sand and you say, `how can we really do this?' " said Marcela Lombana, 29, another designer from RTKL who was taking part in the competition for the first time. ``But it came out awesome."

Event organizers said the contest, which until two years ago was held in Miami Beach, brings architects together to have fun and mingle with people that may not know what architects can do.

"The young talents of each firm get to go out and work as a team," said Jorge S. Kuperman, president of the American Institute of Architects' Miami chapter who helped judge the contest. "You see what's behind the architecture process."

Many of the firms were taking part in their second or third Sand Blast contest.

Forbes Architects, the Coral Gables firm that won a Golden Pail for first place, was participating for the third time, said Kristie Stephenson, an architect with the team.

"Our office gets to come together and have a few drinks and build," said Stephenson, whose team created a jungle scene with a monkey, iguana and elephant. "People look forward to it. The only person that didn't come was on vacation."

The Brickell-based firm Arquitectonica won second place for its sculpture of a wave and sea animals that included a stingray, dolphin and walrus.

Miami International University of Art and Design topped the Student Award category for its depiction of a python entangled with an alligator.

Also competing were Miami Senior High School's digital design lab and vocational industrial club, Design & Architecture Senior High School's architecture club, and architecture students from the University of Miami, whose team won third place overall with a sculpture of a teenager lying on his stomach, complete with a swimsuit and seaweed hair.

"We did some sketches last night and found stuff around the beach," said Chris Glapinski, 21, a fourth-year architecture student at UM. "It's a good way to represent your school, take a break from the studio and see the city."

The contest attracted spectators who admired the architects' work.

"You have these beautiful things coming out of chaos," said Florencia Jimenez-Marcos, 34, a real estate investor from Miami Beach who came with her architect father. "Bringing design

schools and very established firms together with high schools, it levels the playing field. It's a shame more people don't know about it."

For the architects, it was a chance to create something from start to finish, instead of just designing the concept for it.

"We did it with our hands instead of with drawings," said Bacelis, the designer who helped build the dragon. ``I'm very surprised that it came out so well."