

Gold Pelican

\$885,000 golden bird

- A 5½-inch-tall, 77-gram, 22-karat gold pelican.
- Found in 15 feet of water south of Fort Pierce inlet
- Salvaged from a shipwrecked 1715 Fleet, 11 Spanish galleons laden with treasures from the New World.



Treasure hunters find gold from 1715

BY BRITT KENNERLY
FLORIDA TODAY

Treasure hunter Bonnie Schubert has found plenty of aluminum beer cans and lead fishing weights in the Atlantic Ocean, but she recently came up with a gold bird in one hand and a thumbs-up on the other.

Wednesday, the Vero Beach woman and the company for which she subcontracts out of Sebastian announced the details of her August "dream of a lifetime" haul — a 5½-inch-tall, 77-gram, 22-karat gold pelican found two miles south of the Fort Pierce inlet.

Part of the salvage from 11 Spanish ships that sank off the Treasure Coast in a hurricane in July 1715, the artifact was discovered with help from a metal detector, 15 feet under water and buried in more than 8 feet of sand.

Even with what appears to be a missing wing, and an unexplained open spot in the middle of the piece, its appraised value of \$885,000 blows Schubert away.

"It was just totally amazing to blow the sand away and find this gold bird lying on the bottom of the ocean," said Schubert, whose crewmate on the Gold Hawk boat is her 87-year-old mother, Jo Schubert.

"It's something I couldn't even have imagined. It's still amazing. This is definitely the biggest thing we've ever found, without question. It's something you couldn't dream of topping."

Bonnie Schubert is a subcontractor for

Meaning

Historians say the golden pelican represents "the pelican in her piety," used in Christian imagery to represent Christ.



Gold bird valued at \$885K

TREASURE, from 1A

1715 Fleet-Queens Jewels, a private shipwreck salvage operation based in Sebastian. In June, 1715 Fleet-Queens Jewels acquired salvage rights to the fleet from the heirs of famed treasure hunter Mel Fisher. That gives the company the fleet's U.S. Admiralty Custodianship, operating under a contract issued by the state's Division of Historical Resources.

That same month, another subcontractor for 1715 Fleet-Queens Jewels found a bronze swivel cannon containing 50 gold and 40 silver coins, said Brent Brisben, 1715 Fleet-Queen's operations manager. He and Schubert, he said, waited to talk about the recent find until after they researched the piece, had it appraised and after Schubert looked a little more for the supposed missing wing.

What happens next? By law, the state of Florida is entitled to 20 percent of the find from each of the company's contracts, but they don't always take that, Brisben said.

At the end of the year, he said, a required inventory will be sent to the state, which will negotiate with the company. Until then, the piece legally is the property of the fed-

eral admiralty court. Once everything's settled, Brisben and Schubert will split any proceeds equally if the piece sells.

"It'll be a decision between Brent and me and the state on where the piece actually winds up, but it would be nice to cover fuel expenses," Schubert said, laughing. "Right now, it's just a reward to find it."

It's been an unbelievable first few months for the company, "something we could never have dreamed would happen," said Brisben. "We took a look at what the Fishers had found over the past few years and this is far better than any single year they had since 1998. It far exceeded our expectations."

And it's a family dream come true for the Schuberts, two women in a male-dominated business. Jo Schubert is the former captain of a 65-foot freight boat in the Bahamas.

Her daughter said, "to bring up the bird and place it in her hand was a moment I will never forget."

"I've been going on boats with my mom all my life, and it was just the two of us when I found the bird. It was great." ■

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