

# Gold Pelican

## INDIAN RIVER Press Journal

SCRIPPS TREASURE COAST NEWSPAPERS

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### Vero mother-daughter team finds gold statue from 1715 Spanish treasure fleet off Fort Pierce

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**VERO BEACH** — Bonnie Schubert couldn't believe her eyes when, about 1,000 feet off Frederick Douglass Beach near Fort Pierce, she came face to face with a solid gold statue of a bird that had lain under the Atlantic Ocean exactly 295 years and 15 days.

"I remember asking myself, 'Is this real?'" Details about Schubert recalled "The Bird." **A4** Wednesday as the 5.5-inch-tall statue she found Aug. 15 was revealed to the public at her home in the Vero Shores neighborhood of Vero Beach.

"The Bird," as it's come to be known, is real all right.

So is its \$885,000 appraised value.

The statue was aboard one of 11 Spanish ships laden with treasures from the New World that were bound from Havana to the court of King

SEE TREASURE, PAGE A4



SAM WOLFE • Correspondent

Brent Brisben, of 1715 Fleet-Queens Jewels, LLC, points out details in a gold bird found by Bonnie Schubert and her mother Jo while diving for treasure on Aug. 15. "You know that it's out there," said Bonnie Schubert, while talking about treasure located in the waters off of Fort Pierce and Vero Beach. The untarnished artifact is valued at \$885,000.



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Bonnie Schubert, left, jokes with her mother Jo while talking about the gold bird they found on Aug. 15. "It's back to life," said Bonnie. "It's not out there in the sand." The find, located off Fort Pierce, is believed to be part of the 1715 fleet. The untarnished artifact was appraised and valued at \$885,000.

## TREASURE

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Phillip V before encountering a hurricane July 31, 1715, and sinking off the Treasure Coast.

Schubert, 49, found the statue as she and her one-person crew — her 87-year-old mother, Jo Schubert — were combing the plot of ocean bottom they've been assigned as subcontractors for 1715 Fleet-Queens Jewels LLC, a historic shipwreck salvage operation based in Sebastian and Jupiter that acquired rights to the fleet from the heirs of renowned treasure hunter Mel Fisher.

Bonnie Schubert said she had just started to examine a "hole" where several feet of sand had been blown away when she saw the bird.

"I got a hit on the metal detector, and I was hand-fanning away some more sand when I saw it just lying there upright in the sand, absolutely perfect and so impossibly gold," she

said. "Every time you get a hit on the metal detector, you're thinking, 'It's a gold bar; it's a silver bar.' But it's usually a fishing weight or a beer can."

Bonnie Schubert brought the artifact back to the boat where her mother was waiting.

"I could see Bonnie had gold in her hand as she was coming up," Jo Schubert said. "I just started crying."

But in a businesslike fashion, the women stowed the bird in the cabin; and Bonnie Schubert dove back down to the same spot.

"The bird is missing a wing," she explained, "and I was hoping I could find it. Also, there's a cavity in the bird's middle, and I thought I might be able to find what had been in there."

The wing is still missing, and what was in the bird's midsection remains a mystery; but experts believe the relic is a depiction of a "pelican in her piety," said Brent Brisben, operations manager of 1715 Fleet-

## THE WORD ON 'THE BIRD'

**Height:** 5.5 inches  
**Weight:** 77 grams  
**Composition:** 22K gold  
**Appraised at:** \$885,000  
**Discovered:** Aug. 15 in 14 feet of water about 1,000 feet off Frederick Douglass Beach south of Fort Pierce  
**Found by:** Bonnie Schubert, captain of "Gold Hawg," and her mother, Jo Schubert, both of Vero Beach  
**Salvaged from:** One of 11 Spanish ships (possibly the Nieves) that sank in a hurricane July 31, 1715, off the Treasure Coast.

Queen's Jewels.

"Mother pelicans are said to prick their own chests so that they draw blood to feed starving chicks," Brisben said. "The Spanish were devout Roman Catholics, and to them the pelican in her piety represented Christ on the cross shedding his blood to redeem mankind." Now in a safe-deposit box

at a bank Brisben would rather not disclose, the relic's future is uncertain.

By law, the state has first dibs on up to 20 percent of treasure from each salvage site.

"The bird will be about 99 percent of the take from that site," Brisben said, "so the state would have to give up a lot of other treasure to get it. More than likely, the bird will be sold to a collector or at an auction."

The Schuberts and 1715 Fleet-Queen's Jewels will split the proceeds 50-50.

Since acquiring Fisher's admiralty rights to salvage the shipwrecks in June, Brisben said his firm as retrieved between \$1.3 million and \$1.4 million worth of relics — mostly gold and silver coins — from the Atlantic.

Bonnie Schubert, who's been wreck salvaging since 1991, called the bird "the find of a lifetime." But she'll keep looking for more.

"I didn't expect to find it," she said, "and I don't expect to ever find another. But you never know."