

Inversand Fossil Dig Site

Mantua, New Jersey

October 13, 2012



First Fossil Dig Day Ends with Ancient Sea Turtle Fossil Discovery

October 24, 2012

By Florette Press and Katie Clark of *Drexel Now*

Paleontologist Dr. Kenneth Lacovara continues to unearth enthusiasm for the Cretaceous Period—a time when much of our coastal plain was under water. Tri-state area residents came out in droves on Saturday, October 13 for the first Fossil Dig Day at Lacovara’s world-class paleontological site in nearby Mantua Township, N.J.

More than 1,000 residents had the opportunity to dig in designated areas and take home keepsakes like fossil clams, corals and [shark teeth](#).

“Nearly everyone who attended left with a 65-million-year-old-fossil that they dug up with their own hands,” Lacovara said.

One of the goals is for local residents of all ages to get excited about their fossil heritage. More importantly, however, Lacovara is trying to raise awareness about the site’s scientific significance. It’s in jeopardy because the New-Jersey-based company Inversand that’s continuously mining and draining the area—keeping out a more than 57-gallons-per-minute influx of water—may have to cease operations there in the near future due to budget restraints, Lacovara said.

“It would be a lake in a week or two if they turned off the pumps,” he said. “The whole area and all the fossils would be lost.”

Lacovara added that he’s working with Inversand and the Mantua Township Planning and Zoning Committee to save this priceless fossil resource. Lacovara and his team have discovered almost 2,000 fossils at the Mantua excavation site since March 2012. The team’s fossils were on display not only for local residents, but also for local stakeholders and township, county and state officials in attendance.

Of course the site has significant importance as an [educational resource](#), as well, Lacovara said.

“You talk about university- community partnerships, this is a perfect way to take the Drexel ethos— hands-on education, STEM education, citizen science—to southern New Jersey,” he said.

Fossil Dig Day is an event Lacovara would like to [continue](#) annually, or even semi-annually. This inaugural event will be a tough act to follow, however, since participants witnessed the discovery of a fossilized ancient sea turtle, *Taphrosphys*, unearthed by Drexel grad student Paul Ullman.

“As sort of an unplanned grand finale, the crowd watched as this 65-million-year-old turtle emerged from the earth,” Lacovara said.

Less than a week later, Lacovara’s New Jersey dig site was featured on the [Discovery Channel’s Daily Planet](#). The segment showcases various specimens collected from the site, which have been cleaned, sorted and preserved in Lacovara’s lab.

























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