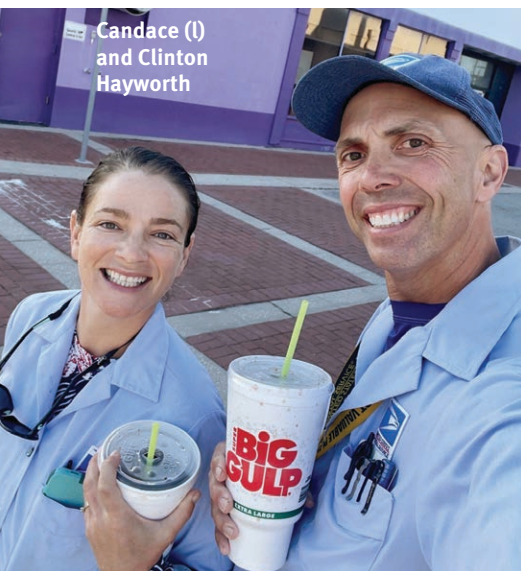


The couple that digs together discovers treasure together

Beep. Beep. Beep.

Right before noon one day in August 2021, Daytona Beach, FL, letter carriers **Clinton Hayworth** and his wife, **Candace Hayworth**, were metal detecting at Ponce Inlet when they heard the noise indicating something metal. Large granite stones line the inlet and create waves that entice surfers. And that means that people sometimes lose things there.

“There was a storm earlier in that week and it had pulled a lot of sand out,” Hayworth explained. “It caused a couple of craters into the beach area, and there was such soft sand that day that I was able to go over that spot—and this is a spot that I had been over hundreds of times before.”



A signal rang up as No. 15 on the metal detector, “which is usually just a soda tab,” Hayworth said. “We were going to pass it up but decided we don’t like to leave trash on the beach.”

They dug up and inspected the item, which definitely wasn’t a soda tab. “It was so corroded, being in the ocean for so long,” Hayworth said. They soon realized it was a gold 1987 class ring and, after taking it home and cleaning it up, they noticed it had initials engraved into it: D.E.B.

“It was 10k gold, and it had a surfer emblem on there, so I was looking through the yearbooks and trying to find out which initials matched up with a surfer-looking guy,” Hayworth said.

He posted about it on the Daytona Dig and Find Metal Detection Club group on Facebook for help reaching the owner. A group member helped track down Donald Edward Brandl’s wife, who thought it was a joke after Hayworth sent her a Facebook message.

Soon Hayworth was in touch with Brandl himself, who said he had lost the ring 34 years earlier, during senior skip day at Ponce Inlet. “I showed him a picture of where it was, and he said, ‘Yeah, that’s exactly the area that I lost it,’” Hayworth said, and added, “He said the wave that he caught when he lost it was one of the best waves he had ever had, so to him, it was worth it.”

“It’s amazing that that ring for 34 years stayed in that spot with all the hurricanes and surf we’ve had,” Brandl told WESH-TV, the local NBC affiliate.

“There had been thousands of people metal detecting over that since ’87, and it just so happened that that one day we just found it,” Hayworth said.

The carriers sent it back to him Priority Mail, of course.

And their new friend, Don Brandl, who lives on 40 acres of Civil War-era land in Alabama that used to be a trading post, invited them up there to search his property. “We’ll definitely take him up on that one day,” Hayworth said.

Hayworth got started in metal detecting when he joined Daytona Dig and Find back in 2002. “That club just kind of gave me the basic knowhow of which metal detector works best in the sand, or underwater, and that kind of thing,” he said. “Once a year, they would have a hunt, and they’d hide silver out in the surf or in parks.”

Candace fell into it about seven years ago on a whim during a beach day, picking up a metal detector Hayworth had brought and having luck finding lots of coins in the surf.

Learning the hobby is mostly just trial and error, he says. Two hours before low tide, the couple will go out to the beach, equipped with their metal detectors, sand scoop and pin-pointer, as well as water, sunscreen and hats.

“A lot of the machines are so sophisticated these days that it’ll give you a signal and it’ll tell you how deep it is, and approximately what size it is,” Hayworth said. “They’re really user-friendly. It’ll tell you if it’s a penny, it’ll tell you if it’s a silver ring, or a silver



Clinton (I) and Candace Hayworth.

coin, or if it's gold. It'll also tell you if it's just a Bud Light pull tab."

After turning on their detectors, the first thing they do is figure out their setting and run interference. "That just basically makes sure if someone has a remote-control car, or another metal detectorist is out there, it's got a separate channel so you're not getting feedback from them, and they're not getting feedback from you," he said.

After that, they'll go to a setting to find "ground balance." When near the soil and moved up a few times, the detector on that setting can sense how dense the soil, sand or rocks are and adjust accordingly, which will typically allow the detector to find items that are within 6 inches.

"After that setting, we wear headphones so that we can adjust so you're not getting the sounds of the beach and everything else, and you can hear those signals and tones," he said. "And then we'll set the volume and pretty

much take it from there."

When they get a hit with the detector, they'll begin to dig it up, sometimes using a sand scoop, a small shovel on a long pole that has holes in it so sand sifts through, so "some of the earrings that we find [will] slide right through," Hayworth said. "But most of the time, it'll pick up rings, pennies and dimes, quarters, hoop earrings."

For tiny items, they use a device called a pin-pointer. "That's like when you go through the airport, it's kind of like the wand, but it's a little bit smaller," he said. "It'll find those earrings, or somebody's gold teeth, or that kind of stuff, the really small stuff. It's pretty sensitive."

Keeping the integrity of the beach is important to them. Though most of the items they find each expedition are "just junk" and could be skipped over, Hayworth says, "we like to dig pretty much everything that we find, because

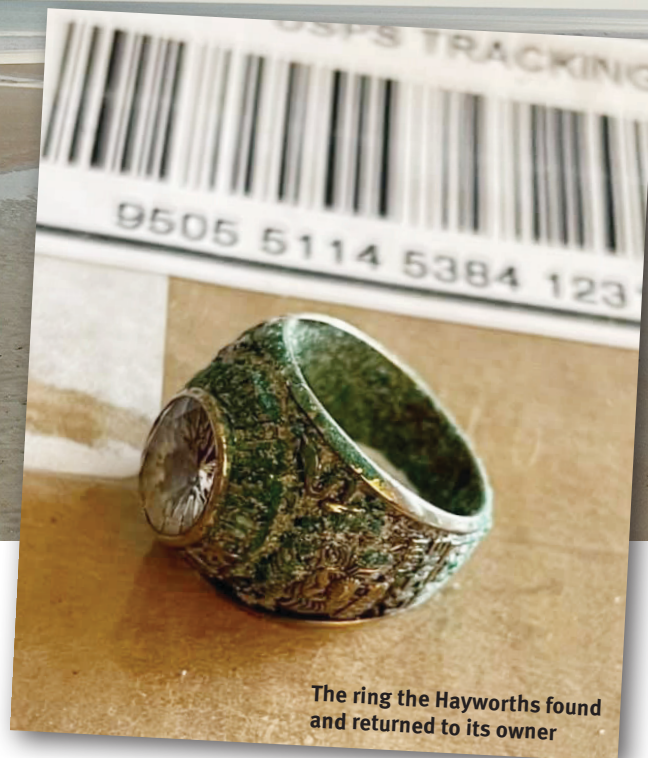
we're kind of cleaning up the beach as we go."

There's no real technique, though—as Hayworth explains, it all comes down to luck. "I've seen people out there that just swing back and forth really high. They'll find as many things as I will just cruising at a slow pace," he said. "It's just the timing of being over that item at the right time, after the right tide and that kind of thing. You just never know what you're going to find."

Over the years, they have found a lot of jewelry and coins, but also things like parking signs, bike trailers and fishhooks.

The beach is their favorite place to search, mostly because it's frequently busy at any given time. "As long as the water is warm enough for people to come to the beach and hang out, there's a good chance that somebody will drop something of value," he said.

The club, which meets once a month but has an online presence



between meetings, makes it easier to help locate people who've lost things. Hayworth said it's a good feeling when they can get something back to people through the local lost and found.

Despite their busy postal schedule, the North Florida Branch 53 members try to do metal detecting at least once a week. "It's much easier to go during the week when the crowds aren't there," Hayworth, a 29-year carrier, said. "It's just nice and peaceful. Otherwise, you have to deal with people asking you, 'What's the best thing you've found?' and they just want to find out more about it—which is understandable."

He added that he's more talkative when people approach than Candace, who has delivered mail since 2017. "She just likes to get out there and kind of zone out and just do her own thing," he says.

The couple used to be able to spend up to eight hours during a session, but since two hurricanes last year, there's much less beach available. "It'll come back eventually, but you really have to time it," Hayworth said. "Now I think the most that we could probably spend out there is about four hours—two hours before low tide and then the two hours after low tide, that's kind of like the sweet spot."

One of their best days was last fall, soon after one of the hurricanes. "There was one area on the beach we were finding silver coin after silver coin after silver coin," he said, and estimated that there were 150 in total. It turned

out to be near an old poker room from the '50s and '60s. "We spent all day—it was signal after signal after signal. We were just pulling all these old coins."

They're still working on cleaning up that haul.

The Hayworths enjoy documenting their finds and the process via a GoPro or iPhone and sharing on their website, as well as posting on YouTube and across social media as @TheCoupleThatDigsTogether.

"It's just a fun sport, and that's what it's all about—just getting out here, having fun and sharing it with others," Hayworth said. "I like getting out there and decompressing and unwinding. It doesn't take a lot of effort. You get out there and you get sunshine. And everybody's usually in a good mood at the beach."

They spend many Sundays, holidays and evenings out on the beach two blocks from their house and usually stick to beaches they know, as some either don't allow metal detecting or require a permit. They do travel for their hobby on occasion, though.

"We like to go on cruises, and we've also taken our metal detectors to different parts of the Caribbean," he said. "Sometimes you find the same stuff that you would back home, beer bottle caps and stuff like that, but every once in a while you'll find a ring in the Bahamas, and that's kind of fun."

Because of the technological advancement in metal detectors, "it's definitely becoming a popular hobby," Hayworth said.

After news about the class ring hit social media, he says, a retired carrier reached out to him about helping him figure out a good beginner metal detector. "I always like teaching people how to get started," he said.

Hayworth is beginning to get some energy back after being diagnosed with an aggressive lymphoma last November. "The chemo just wipes you out," he said. "It's definitely taken a toll on how many times we've been out, but I'm cancer-free now. It's been a wild journey."

Because of that, the Hayworths try to take it easy. Now, he says, "As long as there's no thunderstorms in the evening, we'll go out, and if it's low tide, we'll go out after work. Sometimes we keep our uniforms on and go out there and get a little more sun." But they plan to keep up their activity for the foreseeable future, wherever it may take them.

The lure of possible treasure is always there for the couple that digs together. "When you do find that one cool item, it's pretty neat," Hayworth said. **PR**