

# 'I started shaking'



PHOTOS BY ERIC HASERT/TREASURE COAST NEWSPAPERS

Treasure hunter Brent Brisben (left), captain and owner of 1715 Fleet-Queens Jewels LLC, displays the recent discovery Tuesday of more than 300 gold coins found off the coast of Wabasso Beach on July 30, during a news conference at the Capt Hiram's Resort in Sebastian. The coins, valued \$4.5 million, were found in about 6 feet of water. To see more photos, go to [TCPalm.com](http://TCPalm.com).

## ■ Treasure hunters describe historic \$4.5 million find

**By Janet Begley**  
Special to Treasure Coast  
Newspapers

During his first season as a treasure hunter, Dan Beckingham of Micco didn't expect to find much.

That's because until July 30, all Beckingham and the rest of the Capitana crew found were some silver coins and other artifacts off the coast of Wabasso. Then suddenly their luck changed. They struck gold.

"I was excited just to be on the boat," said Beckingham, during a news conference Thursday at the Capt Hiram's Resort in Sebastian, where the 350 gold coins worth \$4.5 million were

on display. "I never even imagined finding anything like this."

The coins are part of the lost treasure from the 1715 Fleet shipwreck, comprised of 11 galleons laden with treasures from the New World bound for Spain. But all 11 ships were lost during a hurricane off the coast of Florida on July 31, 1715 and most of the treasure still lies beneath the ocean.

Brent Brisben, owner of the Sebastian-based 1715 Fleet-Queens Jewels LLC, started his quest to recover gold and silver off the Treasure Coast in 2010 after acquiring the salvage rights from the family of famed treasure hunter Mel Fisher. Brisben owns and captains



"Indescribable — it's hard to put it into words," diver William Bartlett (front) said of the find. "You're looking at 30 or 40 gold coins laying there in the sand right in front of you that have been there for 300 years, and you're speechless. I started shaking. I didn't feel excited but my head started spinning and I was just beside myself."

the Capitana but was not onboard July 30 when co-captain Jonah Martinez, diver William

Bartlett and Beckingham made the discovery.

See **TREASURE**, 14A

## FROM 1A



ERIC HASERT/TREASURE COAST NEWSPAPERS

Some of the gold coins valued at \$4.5 million found off the coast of Wabasso Beach were on display during a news conference Tuesday at the Capt Hiram's Resort in Sebastian.

## TREASURE from 1A

"The day was unbelievable," said Martinez, who has been hunting treasure for more than 20 years. "When Bill came up to the surface, the first thing I noticed was his glove was off. Then I realized every fingertip was full of gold coins. I thought this is the find of a lifetime."

Bartlett said he had similar feelings as he scoured the ocean floor.

"The experience was surreal," Bartlett said. "You keep asking yourself if it's really happening."

Brisben didn't believe the crew at first when they

reported what they had found and asked Martinez to text him a picture.

"I told him we hit big," Martinez said. "I kept telling him it was for real and he should meet me at the dock to see it for himself."

All three crew members will share their find with Brisben and the state, which is entitled to 20 percent of whatever is recovered at the end of the year.

"We won't get legal title to the coins until next year," Brisben said. "Each guy then gets a share and can do whatever he wants with it."

Despite being covered by sand and seawater for 300 years, the coins are untarnished, Brisben said,

including nine "Royals," which were made for the King of Spain, Philip V, in the early 1700s.

Brisben said he held off announcing his find to make sure all the coins were retrieved from that area of the ocean floor. He added that the discovery was magical because the 300-plus coins were discovered on the 300th anniversary of the shipwreck.

"There is an energy that pervades these shipwrecks," Brisbane said. "If you asked me five or six years ago when I first got into this, I would have never believed. But when you have these types of finds, it makes you realize it is really out there."