Surfing museum set to reopen

Landmark returns in hot new spot

By Chris Monahan
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HUNTINGTON BEACH — With the pier locked and scheduled for demolition after Labor Day, Surf City seems to lack a distinguishing surfing landmark.

But that will change for the better Saturday, with the reopening of the International Surfing Museum at 411 Olive St.

The opening will be part of a weekend celebration that includes a luau, a longboard surfing tournament, an exhibition of wooden automobiles from the 1940s, '50s and '60s, and a street dance featuring Dick Dale, "the king of the surf guitar."

The festivities will take place on Olive between Main and Fifth streets beginning with the ribbon-cutting ceremony at 4:45 p.m. Tickets will be $35. Tickets for the dance only, which begins at 8:30, are $10.

The museum will open to the public Sunday; it will be open daily noon to 6 p.m. Admission will be $1.

The original museum, at Walnut Avenue and Main, opened in June 1988 but closed after eight months. Items were put in storage when the original building was torn down in February 1989 as part of the redevelopment of downtown.

This location — a renovated building from the 1930s — is temporary. According to museum board chairwoman Natalie Kotsch, the permanent home will be 10,000-square-foot building under the new pier.

The pier is scheduled to be finished in summer 1992, but Kotsch said it probably would be another year before the museum moves. The Surfing Hall of Fame, without a home but incorporated and based in San Diego, will be housed at the new museum site.

The new museum location is 2,200 square feet. The renovated Art Deco-style building includes a gray and green tile exterior with glass block windows. Most of the work was paid for by the city redevelopment project, but things such as paint, carpeting and exhibit costs, totaling about $9,000, according to Kotsch, were funded through donations, both corporate and private.

The building is owned by the city and is being leased to the museum for $1 per year.

The first thing visitors will see, as they walk in, will be a small area dedicated to Duke Kahanamoku, widely considered the father of modern surfing. The display will have a bronze bust and plaque taken from the end of the old pier.

Kahanamoku died in 1968, but his widow, Nadine, is scheduled to fly in from Hawaii to help dedicate the museum Saturday.

Other items on display in the museum, which covers eight decades of the sport, include:

- Surfboards dating from the late 19th century to the mid-1960s;
- Trophies from past surfing contests in the Huntington Beach area;
- Original surf music record albums from the '60s, featuring artists such as Dick Dale, the Ventures, Jan and Dean, and Jack Nitzsche;
- The hood ornament, in the shape of a surfer on a wave, from Kahanamoku's Lincoln Continental;
- The museum also plans two other attractions, which will not be in place for the opening but will be added as funding allows: a small theater, placed in a corner, with projection on several walls to give a three-dimensional feed, and a computer catalog system, for those doing research on surfing.