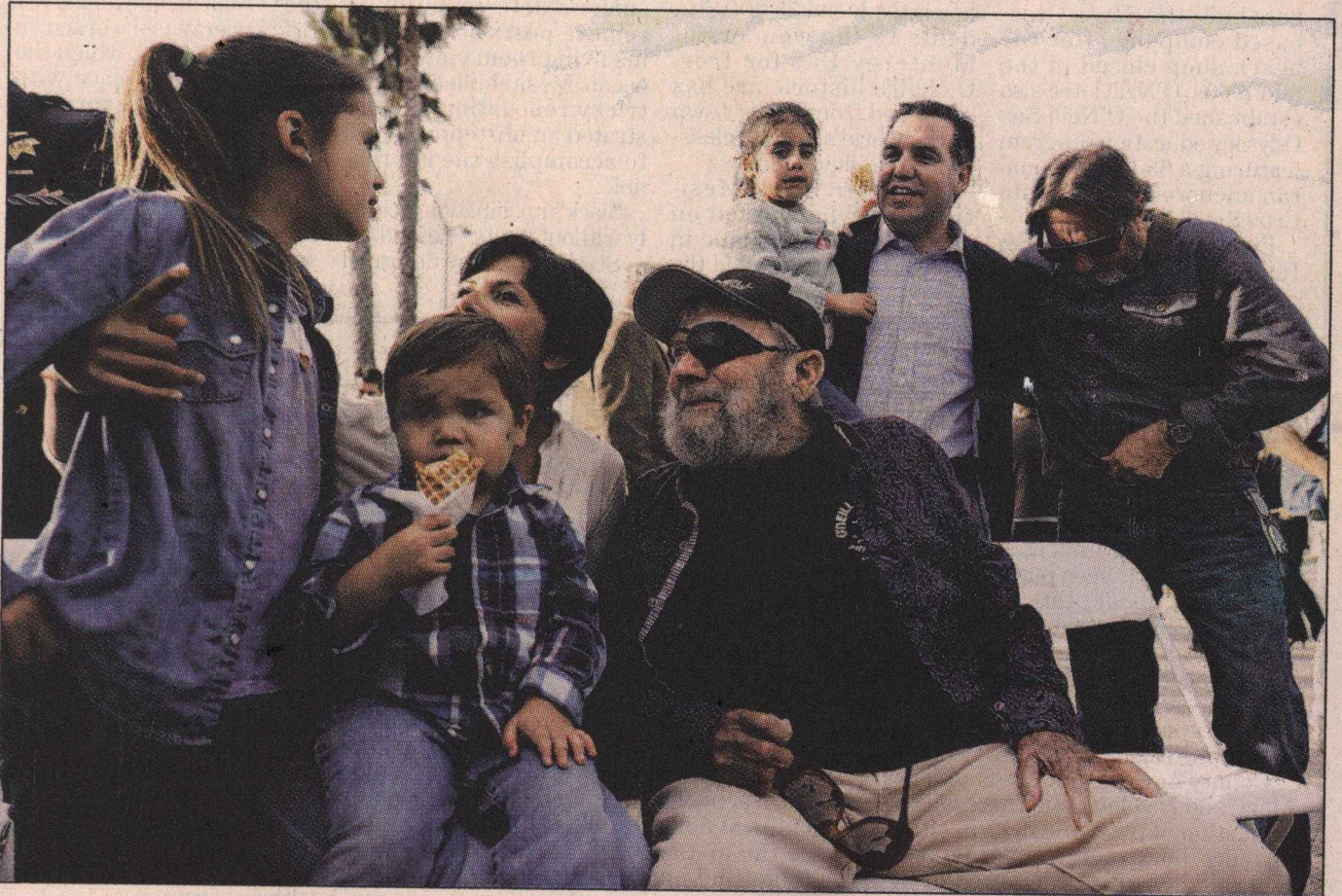


HISTORIC LANDMARK

'A symbol for our coastal economy'

SC thanks Jack O'Neill with plaque, mural marking first surf shop



Jack O'Neill meets with family members after a ceremony marking the original site of his first surf shop as a California Historical Point of Interest on Monday afternoon.

MATTHEW HINTZ/SENTINEL

By J.M. BROWN

jbrown@santacruzsentinel.com

SANTA CRUZ — Surfing icon Jack O'Neill, who will be 90 on Wednesday, is still amazed at the local lore and global empire that swelled from his 500-square-foot surf shop on Cowell Beach.

Opened in 1959 when O'Neill moved from San Francisco, the shack became known as "boys town" — a place where parents would drop their sons to ride waves all day.

Although the shop started by the pioneer of foam surf boards and thermal wetsuits is long gone, its legend will be forever preserved through a new California Historical Point of Interest plaque marking the original site.

"I never in my wildest dreams ever

Historic Preservation

3.26.13



O'NEILL WETSUITS/CONTRIBUTED

SEE O'NEILL ON A2

Jack O'Neill's original surf shop opened in 1959 at Cowell Beach.

O'NEILL

Continued from A1

thought any of this would happen," O'Neill told the Sentinel after a dedication event Monday. "I thought I would make a few boards and have somebody to surf with."

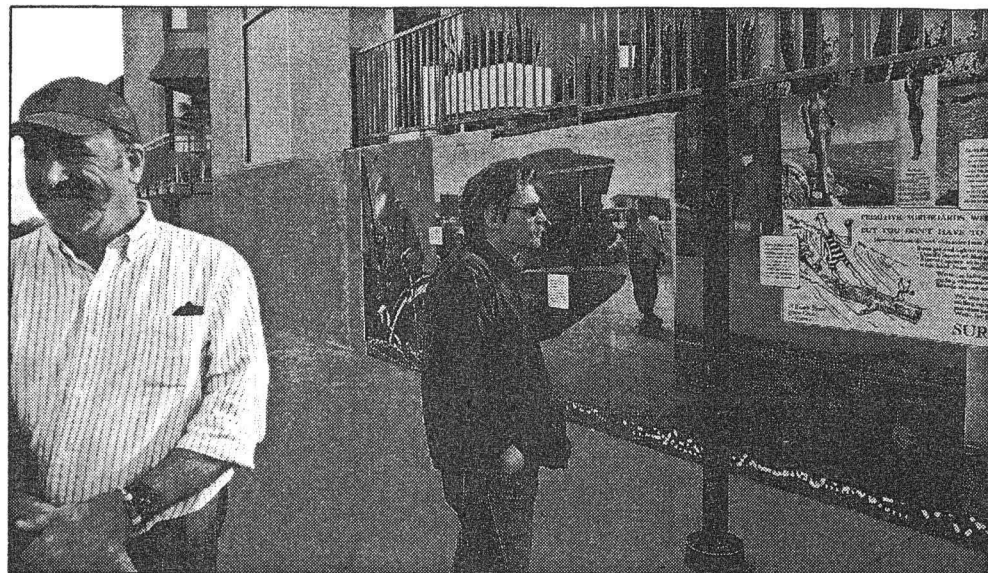
Several black-and-white photos of O'Neill are featured in a temporary paper mural put up with the plaque on a retaining wall separating the surf shop site from the Dream Inn. When he opened the place, O'Neill said town leaders — whom he called "city dads" — didn't consider surfing a legitimate past time, let alone sport.

"They said, 'You're going to sell to five guys on the beach and be all out of business,'" O'Neill said.

But as Councilman David Terrazas told dozens gathered Monday: "How could our city dads get it so wrong?" Terrazas, who led efforts to gain state recognition for the surf shop, called O'Neill Wetsuits "a symbol for our coastal economy."

O'Neill and family members built the Santa Cruz-based company after the beach shop closed in the mid-1960s. O'Neill later also established the O'Neill Sea Odyssey education program featuring a 65-foot catamaran anchored at the Santa Cruz Small Craft Harbor.

Executive Director Dan Haifley noted the program



MATTHEW HINTZ/SENTINEL

A mural painted at the site of Jack O'Neill's first surf shop was unveiled Monday afternoon during a ceremony to honor O'Neill.

has introduced 75,000 students to the wonders of Monterey Bay for free. O'Neill's historic arc has stretched from "boys' town to the world's largest classroom," Haifley said.

Engineer Mark Mesiti Miller, who worked on O'Neill's cliffside home in Pleasure Point, recalled the

surfer's determination to remove posts obstructing his living room view of the ocean. Mesiti Miller said the tricky renovation demonstrated an unstoppable will to accomplish the improbable.

"Jack's imagination is clearly without limits," he said.

Studio Holladay designed

the O'Neill plaque and artist Eric Zwierzynski worked on the photo mural, which the city hopes to replace with permanent, interpretive signs. Zwierzynski said it was an honor to pay tribute to patriarch of surfing culture in Santa Cruz.

"He is such a dude," he said.