



JOHN WRIGHT

A competitor in last year's Steel Pier Classic Surf Contest rides the nose at First Street jetty. Once a longboard-only event, the contest now includes shortboard division, as well as a Boardwalk Surf Art Expo.

## Steel Pier Classic to be better - that's the long and short of it

By John Streit  
Correspondent

The Virginia Longboard Federation's fifth annual Steel Pier Classic Surf Contest and Surf Art Expo at the Oceanfront this weekend has a new aspect this year — shortboards.

That addition promises to make this Steel Pier Classic bigger than ever. And, according to federation executive director Mary Knight, it will provide a better vehicle for the contest and art show's main purpose — raising money to aid underprivileged children.

"The bottom line is raising money for charity, and shortboarders outnumber longboarders probably two, three to one," said Knight. "In order to increase our revenue, we opened it up. We wanted to make it more of an everyone's-involved-in-the-community kind of thing."

The three-day event, which starts Saturday, will take over the Oceanfront between First and Third streets with Boardwalk art galleries, vendors and upwards of 500 amateur and professional surfers. The \$35 contest entry fees and money raised from the event's sponsors directly benefit the Noblemen of Virginia Beach.

Competitive surfing veteran

### going?

**What** Fifth annual Steel Pier Classic Surfing Contest and Surf Art Expo to benefit the Noblemen of Virginia Beach

**Where** First through Third streets at the Oceanfront.

**When** 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday through Monday

**Cost** Free

**Info** Contact Mary Knight at 409-1363 or surfchic38@aol.com

for him.

"It's an event that's designed to bring the surfing community together," said Merritt, 39, of Kempsville. "Contests like (the East Coast Surfing Championships) are geared more toward commercial interest and pushing retail, but this is a true hometown event that taps into the soul of Virginia Beach surfing."

Knight, a resident of Red Mill Farms, created the event five years ago after several friends asked her to put on a longboard-only contest. She had spearheaded several women's-only contests.

Knight wanted the event to have a purpose beyond providing a venue for competitive

"We came up with all the answers: We'll raise money for charity and we'll get all the longboarders out."

The longboard-only event was a hit with the local longboarding community and has expanded every year since its inception. But the decision to allow shortboard divisions this year is a clear diversion from the past, and Merritt said some people aren't happy about that.

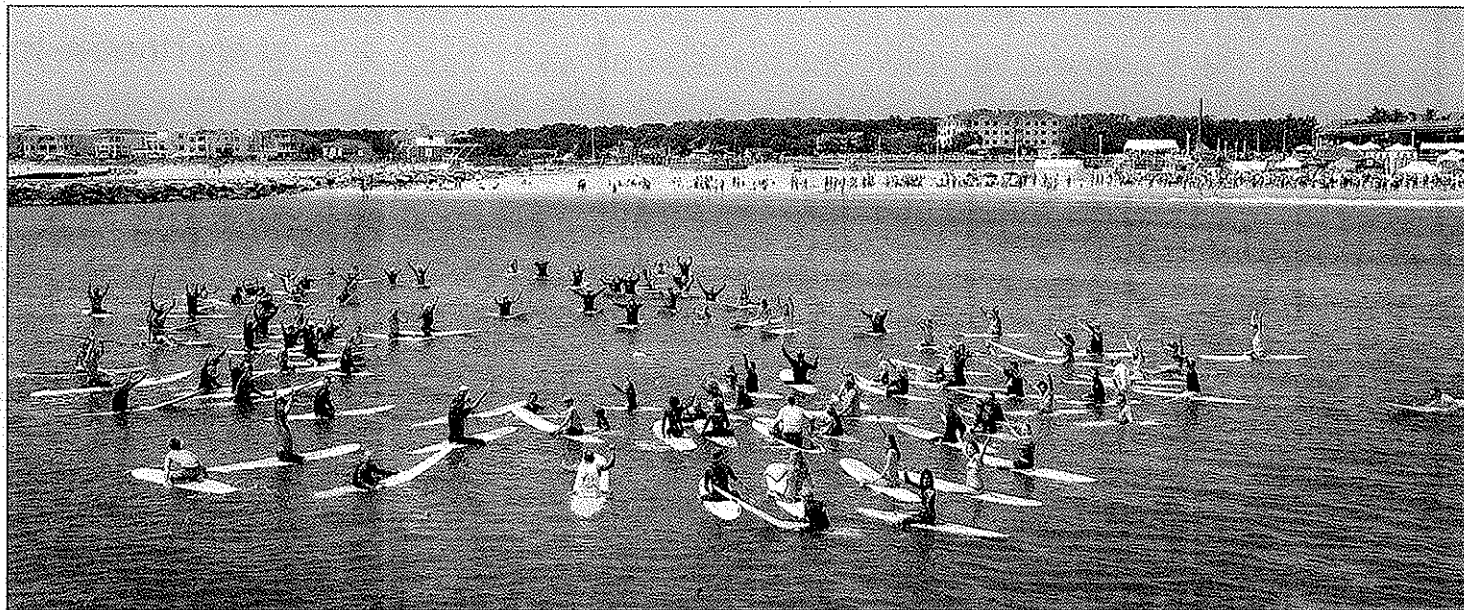
"But surfing is surfing and good surfing is always recognizable. Plus, the contest is about supporting our community and raising money for the kids."

Another new addition is the Surf Art Expo, which provides an outlet for ocean-inspired artists to gain exposure. Knight said the expo is limited to surf-related art.

The weekend event, a partner in education with Virginia Beach City Public Schools, also will host a surf art competition that pits several of the city's magnet art programs against each other. Local art mainstay Rick Romano will be a judge.

"The art show will really embrace the roots of surfing," Knight said. "We had very little expectations in the first year in terms of drawing artists, but we have 21 spots filled so far

## Virginia Beach | paying tribute



PATRICK McLAUGHLIN | SPECIAL TO THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

**Competitors in the fifth annual Steel Pier Classic surf contest at First Street at the Oceanfront on Monday hold their traditional Hawaiian-style paddle-out ceremony in honor of America's fallen servicemen and women. The competition and accompanying art show, sponsored by the Virginia Longboard Federation, aim to raise money for underprivileged children.**