

Museum to open to public

■ The approval of a second sign for the National Museum of American Illustration on Bellevue Avenue clears the way for a general admission opening.

By Janine L. Weisman
Daily News staff

NEWPORT — Applause greeted a unanimous decision by the city's Zoning Board of Review Monday night to allow the National Museum of American Illustration to put up a sign on the wall along Bellevue Avenue.

Laurence and Judy Cutler claimed victory after a nearly year long battle to win permission to put up the 3-by-4-foot sign to help people find their museum at Vernon Court, the only Bellevue Avenue attraction that does not have an entrance on Bellevue Avenue. Visitors must turn onto Victoria Avenue to get to the main entrance of the museum, which houses original drawings and paintings by Maxfield Parrish, N.C. Wyeth and Norman Rockwell, among others.

"Judy actually had tears on her cheeks as we walked out of the chamber," said Laurence Cutler, the museum's chairman and co-founder. His wife is the museum director and co-founder.

To celebrate, the museum will open this weekend for general admission for the first time. It had previously been open only for private tours. Hours are Saturday and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and then the museum closes for the season until next May. Visitors can also shop at the pre-opening of the new museum store.

The sign went up on the wall at the corner of Shepard Avenue Wednesday morning. The museum already had a freestanding sign, but Laurence Cutler said that the museum deserved to have two signs just as the Preservation Society of Newport County's mansions and Salve Regina University's Pell Center have.

The Historic District Commission last February denied the Cutlers'

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Above: Laurence Cutler, chairman of co-founder of the National Museum of American Illustration, stands in the new museum store. The museum will open Saturday for general admission.

Left: This sign on the wall along Bellevue Avenue was unanimously approved Monday night by the Newport Zoning Board of Review.

David Hansen/Daily News photos

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request for the wall-mounted sign and banner for its flag pole. They successfully appealed to the Zoning Board of Review in August but still needed to obtain a variance to the city's sign ordinance. The Zoning Board Monday night granted the variance, needed because the wall-mounted sign exceeded the maximum of six square feet allowed in the residential zoning district.

Cutler was surprised to find that the Bellevue Avenue-Ochre Point Neighborhood Association — which had objected to his request when it was before the Historic District Commission — had no objections before the Zoning Board. In fact, the association's lawyer, Turner C. Scott, was happy to hear the museum's announcement about opening this weekend. Scott said he planned to take his kids.

"It's an incredible wealth of art. That's for sure," Scott said.

"Both Mr. and Mrs. Cutler have great style and I'm sure they're going to do things well, and they have been doing things well. There's no complaint from the association about the way they run the establishment."

Scott said the neighborhood association wants the Cutlers to

continue to uphold a series of conditions they agreed on before the Zoning Board denied a special use permit for their museum. The Cutlers later successfully appealed the board's decision to Superior Court. Laurence Cutler said that he considers the conditions invalid but said he hasn't violated any of them anyway.

"This one wall mounted sign, I guess in a vacuum, it's not objectionable at all," Scott said. "We're hoping Mr. Cutler will show as much style and class in his regulation of signs as he has in his regulation of his establishment at this point. We have every belief that he will."