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## Southern Surfing

### Exhibit explores history of 'hanging 10' in Southeastern N.C.

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Joseph "Skipper" Funderburg refers to the 1950s as his apprentice years for surfing.

Starting at the age of 6, he spent his days in Wrightsville Beach skimming along the shoreline on inflatable, canvas surf mats and bodysurfing.

Several years later, he stood up and rode the waves on the beach's newest sensation - surfboards shipped to the East Coast from California.

From the early days in the 1960s when the first young surfers ran into the local waters to the numerous surf shops and competitions that came along, Funderburg has collected bits and pieces along the way to document the growth of Wilmington's surf culture.

His contributions of old photographs and film posters, along with donations from other local surf pioneers, have been compiled into a special exhibit that opens today at the University of North Carolina Wilmington's Randall Library.

"Country Soul: The Surfing Experience in Southeastern North Carolina" is on display in the library's special collections room and runs until Nov. 30.

"It ensures the surfing past for future generations," said Funderburg, an alumnus of UNCW who also has written a book about the region's surfing history.

He commended the university for setting aside the space and helping to put up the showing.

The exhibit, the first formal display of this size for area surfing memorabilia, came together after five years of work by Funderburg and Peter Fritzler, a sciences librarian at Randall.

The two had been sharing coordination of the Cape Fear Surfing Archive, a collection of newspaper and magazine clippings, video interviews and historical references all painstakingly pieced together to show how surfing evolved in the region.



Staff Photo | Paul Stephen

Visitors to UNCW's Randall Library look at historical surfboards, photographs and memorabilia at a new exhibit titled 'Country Soul: The Surfing Experience in Southeastern North Carolina' during the opening Tuesday.

"What we're hoping to do is to become a central place where people can come and learn about surfing," said Fritzler, who initially tackled the archiving project in 2002 out of his personal interest in surfing as well as being a history buff.

"People were riding waves in one form or another as early as the 19-teens in surf canoes," he said. "We found evidence of people making belly boards or boogie boards out of marine plywood and varnishing them and riding those in the 1920s and into the '30s."

### **A first ride in '63**

But Fritzler pinpoints the area's first surfer by modern-day standards as Robert Parker, who found a surfboard in his garage and took it out in 1963.

The board belonged to his cousin's fiance, a Fort Bragg soldier originally from California.

By the next summer, Parker and his friends spent their days listening to the Beach Boys, watching surf movies from California and Hawaii and praying for waves.

"In 1963, there's one or two people surfing at Wrightsville Beach," Fritzler said. "Then after that, it really kind of exploded. People were pretty hungry for it."

On display in the exhibit are two boards from East Coast Surfboards, which became North Carolina's first surfboard manufacturer when it opened in Carolina Beach in 1964.

One of the boards is the last one East Coast ever made.

Fritzler, who has interviewed several of Wrightsville Beach's original surfers as part of the library's oral history program, said several key people from the era donated items for the exhibit.

"We're throwing a hodgepodge of things together," Fritzler said. "It's kind of a loose collection of materials that tells a story."

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