

JERSEY SHORE PROFILE

SURF NEW JERSEY

The Impact of The Waves, The Icons, and The Legacies on Jersey Shore Culture

by Jill Ocone



Below: Surfer Zach Humphreys in Bay Head.

Right: The New Jersey Surf Museum at Tuckerton Seaport.



Jill Ocone

While the Jersey Shore might be known as the best vacation spot along the Eastern seaboard with its boardwalks and miles of pristine beaches, there's a unique element to the shore that locals have embraced for decades. With its sweet swells, beautiful breaks, and laid-back lifestyle, Jersey's coastline has inspired and driven a surf culture like no other in the country.

Surfing dates back to more than 4,000 years ago when islanders in the South Pacific floated on logs or reed bunches to travel from place to place. The father of modern-day surfing, original "Big Kahuna" Duke Kahanamoku, laid the foundation for New Jersey surfing in 1912 when he took to the waves off Atlantic City on his longboard. The five-time Olympic swimming medalist left an indelible footprint along the Jersey Shore as he started the movement that popularized surfing worldwide.

Surfing in New Jersey is unique for a number of reasons, one being its long-standing anonymity among the national and international surfing scenes. "The fact that New Jersey has some of the best surfing in the world surprises most," said Dr. William "Doc" Rosenblatt, cofounder of the Jersey Shore Surfrider Foundation chapter and cultivator of the 2013 TedX Talk titled *Surprises about Surfing in New Jersey*. "During the 1960s, media and films focused on the southern California and Hawaii surf scenes. It wasn't really until

Jersey surfers traveled out of state and hit the waves with that Jersey attitude that, little by little, Jersey surfers and its surf scene started to gain respect," he said.

The Jersey Shore surf scene today encompasses a lot more than scraping for a ride on a post-storm-swelled break at one of many iconic sweet surf spots. The unique culture that has evolved includes surfers as well as surf photographers and videographers, surf artists and writers, summer surf camps up and down the coast for all ages, surf festivals and music, lingo and fashion trends, and a whole lot of locals on dawn patrol no matter what the season or the temperature.

The short jetties and sandbars along the beaches in Monmouth and Ocean counties translate into awesome breaks and steady swells at the Jersey Shore, especially after approaching weather systems send in the larger wave sets. Ironically enough, the best waves typically arrive outside of the summer season.

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As surfboard shapers and crafters realized the surf industry's potential for a huge economic market along the Jersey coast, many took the chance in setting up shop along the Atlantic Ocean. Rosenblatt explained, "People started realizing that there is, indeed, surf here in New Jersey, but we still weren't considered a destination worthy of visiting because waves are pretty non-existent during the warm summer months." The improvement of wetsuit technology, combined with the arrival of social media and digital photography, led to another shift in the perception of Jersey as a legitimate surfing spot as more people were exposed to the reality of Jersey's awesome breaks.

Swells wane and wax with the tides and the weather and have been known to frustrate Jersey Shore surfers by remaining glassy and flat, sometimes for weeks at a time. But after an offshore storm system such as a hurricane or a nor'easter churns or approaches, locals and out-of-towners alike flood well-known breaks such as Jenkinson's in Point Pleasant Beach, 10th Avenue in Belmar, Casino Pier in Seaside Heights, J Street in Seaside Park, or the Manasquan Inlet Surfing Beach. Fall and winter storms along the Jersey Shore create waves like

Sam Hammer getting air at Jenkinson's in Point Pleasant Beach.



Ray Hallgreen

nowhere else in the country so much so that eleven-time world surfing champion Kelly Slater was spotted surfing in Monmouth County with fellow professional surfer and Lavallette native Sam Hammer in the Halloween storm of 2017.

As a result, both novice and experienced surfers must appreciate the ocean and take precautions against rip tides while learning how to properly withstand dangerous currents and tidal surges. However, it's that "Jersey Attitude" that makes Jersey surfers stand out in a positive manner.

Jersey surfers possess a certain urgency when entering the water that differs from surfers in other areas of the country, especially the West

coast. "Jersey surfers know the window of rideable waves can be short. A shift in the wind can mean waves quickly disappear or suddenly kick up in the middle of the afternoon. That lack of consistency fuels the awareness that the waves might not be here tomorrow, so no matter what, Jersey surfers will get up bright and early to catch those waves today," Rosenblatt explained. "That attitude, combined with the incredible surfing abilities found riding the Jersey Shore breaks, led to the world respecting our stage."

New Jersey has set the bar for cultivating, honoring, and preserving all things surf through two separate yet linked initiatives: the New Jersey Surf Museum and the New Jersey Surfing Hall of Fame (NJSHOF). In fact, New Jersey has the exclusive distinction of currently being the only state on the Eastern seaboard with both a museum and a hall of fame dedicated solely to surfing and to honoring its own.

The New Jersey Surf Museum

In 2010, Long Beach Island native Jon Coen pitched an idea to Tuckerton Seaport about an exhibit dedicated to surfing. Coen, a well-known area surf writer, photographer, and content creator knew from his vast portfolio of work centered around surfing that such an exhibit would be well-received. With support from the Seaport and a host of like-minded supporters, that surfing exhibit swelled into what is today known as the New Jersey



A quilt made from surf t-shirts at the New Jersey Surf Museum.

Jill Ocone

Surf Museum.

The Museum explores and preserves the historic connections to the sport and the lifestyle of the New Jersey surfer and tells the story of surfing in the state through its exhibits and artifacts. From the early days of Duke Kahanamoku's lasting example through the vast array of surfboards on display, surfing's New Jersey beginnings and rich heritage are evident. Many of the boards were crafted and donated by Long Beach Island surf icon and NJSHOF inaugural class inductee Richard Lisiewski, founder of Matador Surfboards, who passed away earlier this year. A pioneer of the New Jersey surf scene, Lisiewski crafted his first board out of wood and rode it, finless, off Seaside during the mid-1940s, and that legendary board is one of the many historical boards displayed at the Museum.

Located on the docks across from Tuckerton Seaport's visitor's center, the Museum also boasts an extensive collection of memorabilia from such organizations as the Eastern Surfing Association (which was started more than fifty years ago in Belmar by Cecil Lear and remains a premier amateur surfing association) and the Long Beach Island Surfing Association. Visitors will also enjoy a vast array of surf art, historic magazines, vintage clothing, and environmental displays with surf music and videos playing on a loop. Admission to the New Jersey Surf Museum is included with admission to Tuckerton Seaport.

The New Jersey Surfing Hall of Fame

About the same time as the New Jersey Surf Museum was finally taking shape, another initiative surfaced as the result of a now-famous Facebook post by surfer and poet Jim Kirk on January 1, 2015. Little did the Stockton professor know his simple, heartfelt post about finding a way to honor the who's who of the Jersey surfing world would grow into the New Jersey Surfing Hall of Fame. "The East Coast Surfing Hall of Fame had been around for years,



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Vintage surfboards on display the New Jersey Surf Museum.

but Jim threw out the idea of doing something here in Jersey for the homegrown legends," said NJSHOF secretary John James Ryan.

A steering committee with twenty-three surfers and volunteers of all ages quickly formed, and before they knew it, the first inauguration ceremony for the newly-established New Jersey Surfing Hall of Fame was held later that year, organized in part by committee member Kris Kopstafis who owns Homegrown Coffee Bar & Surf Lounge on Main Street in Manasquan.

Thirty-five people were inducted into the inaugural class in 2015, many of whom hail from Monmouth and Ocean counties including renowned surf photographer Dick "Mez" Meseroll from Manasquan who heads up the photography division at *Eastern Surf Magazine*, surfboard shaper and two-time world qualifier Vince Tronic from Allenhurst/Long Branch, and surfer/former storeowner Greg "Grog" Mesanko from Seaside Heights.

The NJSHOF has evolved into a not-for-profit charity that strives to honor and recognize surfers, artists, media/photographers, and those with significant achievements in the surf community from Sandy Hook to Cape May where many world-class surfers and achievements originated. Inductions for the NJSHOF are held every two years, while surf awards are presented in the off-years. The 2019

inductions are scheduled for May 31 at the Algonquin Arts Theatre in Manasquan and the list of inductees will be made public in March.

"We've lost too many of the great ones like the Rich Lisiewski and Chris Rooneys of the world to not acknowledge them in our own Jersey way, so hopefully we can pack the Algonquin this year as a tribute to those who have come before us and have had a serious impact on New Jersey surfing and beyond," said current NJSHOF president and 2017 inductee Brian Heritage. "We look to involve and honor both the young and the old alike because that leads to longevity and sustainability for the HOF in the future. The NJSHOF also focuses on promoting the up-and-coming generations in our off-year Surfer Awards with the hope to see the fruits of our roots flourish."

"Dan Heritage, Brian's dad, was one of those first-generation surf shapers who took a risk by setting up shop in Jersey," Rosenblatt said. (The elder Heritage was honored posthumously as a 2015 inductee.) "And here's his son, Brian, still involved, still running Heritage Surf and Sport, and still passing down the example set by Dan."

It's his father's legacy that continues to inspire Heritage. "I'm satisfied that, by being inducted, I continued his legacy of promoting surfing to others and allowing everyone to

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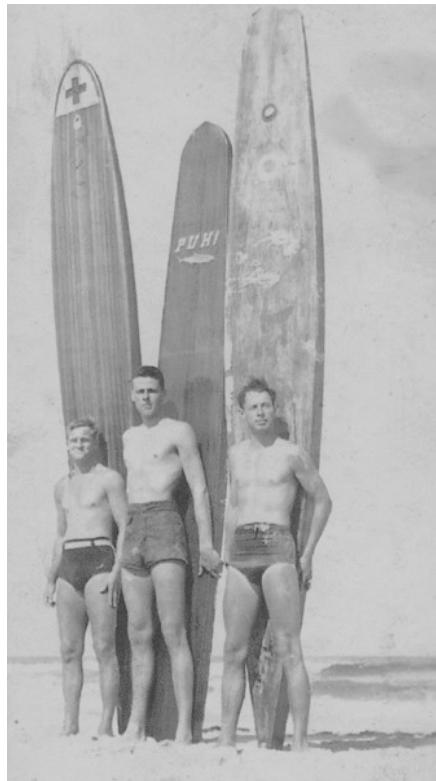
enjoy the sport, no matter what their background or economic status. Only a surfer knows the feeling of being in the water, and the fact that I can continue to give young surfers the opportunity of competing on a world stage through mentorship and sponsoring is what I'm most proud of as an inductee."

Heritage said that the NJSHOF accepts potential inductee nominations from fellow surfers and the public. Every nominee's bio is carefully reviewed by the shoreline directors to determine established criteria including his/her sphere of influence, time of dominance, media presence and/or lifetime achievement, and contributions to the New Jersey surfing community, then the voting board determines who will be inducted. The minimum age of nominees is forty years old, and nominees who aren't selected for the NJSHOF are then eligible for induction in perpetuity thereafter.

Heritage stated that the NJSHOF's primary goal is to acknowledge the historic roots of Jersey's rich and diverse surfing culture and to highlight those who paved the way for present and future generations of Garden State surfers. "Without the acknowledgment of these pathfinders and trailblazers, you have no foundation to help our culture to keep flourishing. That foundation and continuing the circle has led Jersey to the forefront of east coast surfing in my opinion and our evolution will continue and become more impactful with the NJSHOF showing and, most importantly, celebrating our tribes' achievements together," he said.

Rumson native and 2015 inductee Gary Germain not only served as the first President of the NJSHOF but is now president of the East Coast Surfing Hall of Fame. Germain traveled the world as a competitive surfer during the 1970s and knows some of the best waves are found at home. "There's an old saying about the friendly rivalry between Florida and New Jersey surfing bragging rights—that Florida may have the oranges but New Jersey has the juice. And the juice is the waves."

Germain is proud of the model that has evolved and been established by the NJSHOF, which is now becoming the standard. He explained, "The NJSHOF has become the model of



Early surfing pioneers of the Jersey Shore. Left to right: Henry "Stretch" Pohl, Bob Hensler, and Mike Howes at Ortley Beach, 1935.

courtesy of New Jersey Surf Museum

sorts, and as other states are starting their own halls of fame, they are looking to NJSHOF as the example. Even the East Coast Surfing Hall of Fame has modified some of their practices based upon the example set here at the Jersey Shore."

Germain said that with over 65% of the surf-related industry sales stemming from the East Coast, and from the tri-state area in particular which includes New Jersey, it's no surprise that the Jersey Shore is home to legends, groundbreakers, and the next generation. "It was time to start recognizing those homegrown surf pioneers, and that's what we did."

When the NJSHOF was established, organizers knew they needed a headquarters for their operations. The problem was solved almost as quickly as it arose: what better place to be the home of an organization dedicated to preserving New Jersey's rich surfing heritage and the legacy of

historically valuable surfers, images, and places than the New Jersey Surf Museum? "The Hall of Fame has a repository of New Jersey surf culture right in the Museum," Rosenblatt said. "With awareness of surfing culture and history already playing a role, it was the perfect place." One of the long-term goals of the NJSHOF is to grow and cultivate the Museum's collections with an emphasis on New Jersey origins.

Germain and his counterparts remain passionate about surfing because, as he says, it's a sport that transcends age, location, gender, and background. "Once you get on a board and paddle out, its hooked on you forever...and it doesn't let go," said Germain.

While each surfer develops a unique and personal relationship with the ocean, the relationships and bonds formed with fellow surfers along the way are strong and, in most cases, for life, whether one surfed competitively against the surfer sitting next to him or her at the NJSHOF Surf Awards or is taking his or her first ride on the ocean's waves. Rosenblatt said, "We're a tribe, plain and simple, and there's always room for more members."

Surfing is as much a part of the Jersey Shore lifestyle and culture as anything. Thanks to the drive and the commitment of the volunteers from both the New Jersey Surf Museum and the New Jersey Surfing Hall of Fame, locals and visitors alike can learn from and about Jersey's rich surfing past, celebrate and participate in Jersey's surfing present, and create the future by joining the tribe, embracing the culture, and surfing the Jersey Shore's idyllic breaks. ♦

The New Jersey Surf Museum is located at Tuckerton Seaport & Baymen's Museum at 120 West Main Street in Tuckerton. For more information, call (609) 296-8868 or visit www.tuckertonseaport.org/nj-surf-museum.

The New Jersey Surfing Hall of Fame is based at the New Jersey Surf Museum. For more information, call (609) 759-0970, visit www.newjerseysurfinghalloffame.com, or mail P.O. Box 983, Tuckerton NJ 08087.

SURF SHOP DIRECTORY - MONMOUTH & OCEAN COUNTIES

Listed by county from north to south.

MONMOUTH COUNTY

Lucky Dog Surf Co.

1096 Ocean Avenue
Sea Bright, (732) 844-WAVE
www.luckydogsurf.com
Hours: Sun. - Fri.: 10:30 AM - 5:00 PM;
Sat.: 10:00 AM - 6:00 PM

Billabong - Shrewsbury

512 Broad Street
Shrewsbury, (732) 219-9600
www.thegroveatshrewsbury.com/billabong.html
Hours: Mon. - Fri.: 9:30 AM - 8:00 PM; Sat.:
9:30 AM - 7:30 PM; Sun.: 10:00 AM - 6:00 PM

Brave New World - Little Silver

61 Oceanport Avenue
Little Silver, (732) 842-6767
www.bravesurf.com
Hours: Mon. - Fri.: 10:00 AM - 8:00 PM; Sat.:
10:00 AM - 6:00 PM; Sun.: 11:00 AM - 5:00 PM

TAK Waterman Surf n Fish

129 Brighton Avenue
Long Branch, (732) 272-1285
www.takwaterman.com
Hours: Mon. - Fri.: 10:00 AM - 6:00 PM;
Sat. - Sun.: 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Glide Asbury Park

820 Bangs Avenue
Asbury Park, (732) 250-6398
www.glidesurfco.com
Hours: Mon. - Fri.: 11:00 AM - 6:00 PM; Sat.:
10:00 AM - 6:00 PM; Sun.: 10:00 AM - 5:00 PM

Eastern Lines Surf Shop

1605 Ocean Avenue
Belmar, (732) 681-6405
www.easternlines.com
Hours: Winter: Fri.: 12:00 PM - 5:30 PM;
Sat.: 10:00 AM - 5:00 PM; Sun.: 11:00 AM -
5:00 PM; Summer: 10:00 AM - 5:00 PM daily

Bare Wires Surf Shop

1307 3rd Avenue
Spring Lake, (732) 359-7780
www.barewiresurfshop.com
Hours: Mon. - Sat.: 10:00 AM - 6:00 PM;
Sun.: 10:00 AM - 5:00 PM

Inlet Outlet Surf Shop

146 Main Street
Manasquan, (732) 223-5842
www.inletoutletsurfshop.com
Hours: Mon. - Sat.: 10:00 AM - 6:00 PM;
Sun.: 10:00 AM - 5:00 PM

NORTHERN OCEAN COUNTY

Brave New World - Point Pleasant Beach

1208 Richmond Avenue
Point Pleasant Beach, (732) 899-8220
www.bravesurf.com
Hours: Mon. - Fri.: 10:00 AM - 8:00 PM; Sat.:
10:00 AM - 7:00 PM; Sun.: 10:00 AM - 6:00 PM

Gordon's Surf Shop

527 Bay Avenue
Point Pleasant Beach, (732) 475-7984
www.gordonsurfshop.com
Hours: Mon. - Sat.: 11:00 AM - 7:00 PM;
Sun.: 10:00 AM - 6:00 PM

Baja East Surf Shop

2600 Bridge Avenue
Point Pleasant, (732) 892-9400
www.facebook.com/bajaeast.surfshop
Hours: 10:00 AM - 6:00 PM daily

Beach House Classic Boardshop

517 Main Avenue
Bay Head, (732) 714-8566
beach-house-classic.shoplightspeed.com
Hours: Summer: 10:00 AM - 5:00 PM daily;
Winter: Fri. - Mon.: 10:00 AM - 5:00 PM

Ocean Hut Surf Shop

3111 Route 35 North
Lavallette, (732) 793-3400
www.oceanhut.com
Hours: 10:00 AM - 6:00 PM daily

Right Coast Surf Shop

214 SE Central Avenue
Seaside Park, (732) 854-9300
www.rightcoastseasidepark.com
Hours: Fri. - Wed.: 9:00 AM - 7:00 PM;
Thurs.: 10:00 AM - 5:00 PM

Brave New World - Toms River

1272 Hooper Avenue
Toms River, (732) 505-3600
www.bravesurf.com
Hours: Mon. - Fri.: 10:00 AM - 9:00 PM; Sat.:
10:00 AM - 8:00 PM; Sun.: 11:00 AM - 6:00 PM

SOUTHERN OCEAN COUNTY & LONG BEACH ISLAND

Jetty - Flagship Store

509 N. Main Street
Manahawkin, (800) 900-6435
www.jettylife.com
Hours: Mon. - Fri.: 11:00 AM - 5:00 PM;
Sat.: 10:00 AM - 5:00 PM; Sun.: closed

Farias Surf and Sport - Surf City

5th Street and Long Beach Boulevard
Surf City, (609) 494-8616
www.fariassurf.com
Hours: 9:00 AM - 8:00 PM daily

Wave Hog

620 Long Beach Boulevard
Ship Bottom, (609) 494-1040
www.wavehogsurfshop.com
Hours: Fri. - Sun.: 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM.
Call for summer hours.

Ron Jon Surf Shop

201 9th and Central Avenue
Ship Bottom, (609) 494-8844
www.ronjonsurfshop.com
Hours: 10:00 AM - 6:00 PM daily

Surf Unlimited

1820 South Long Beach Boulevard
Ship Bottom, (609) 494-3555
www.facebook.com/surfunlimited
Hours: Thu. - Sat.: 11:00 AM - 5:00 PM; Sun.:
11:00 AM - 4:00 PM; Call for summer hours.

Farias Surf & Sport - Flagship Store

2800 Long Beach Boulevard
Ship Bottom, (609) 494-7368
www.fariassurf.com
Hours: 9:00 AM - 9:00 PM daily

Island Surf & Sail

3304 Long Beach Boulevard
Brant Beach, (609) 494-5553
www.islandsurf-sail.com
Hours: Mon. - Fri.: 10:00 AM - 6:00 PM;
Sat. - Sun.: 9:00 AM - 6:00 PM

Brighton Beach Surf Shop

8511 South Long Beach Boulevard
Long Beach Township, (609) 290-4590
www.brightonbeachsurfshop.com
Hours: Open by chance or by appointment.
Call or text (609) 290-4590 for an
appointment.

Farias Surf and Sport - Beach Haven

23 North Bay Avenue
Beach Haven, (609) 492-0200
www.fariassurf.com
Hours: 9:00 AM - 10:00 PM daily

South End Surf 'N' Paddle

220 South Bay Avenue
Beach Haven, (609) 492-8223
www.southendsurfnpaddle.com
Hours: Fri. - Sun.: 10:00 AM - 5:00 PM.
Call for summer hours.