

For Reference

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# Huntington Pier draws 500,000 on opening day

By Laura-Lynne Powell

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HUNTINGTON BEACH — The

long-awaited opening of the Huntington Beach Pier brought more than 300,000 people to a ribbon-cutting ceremony Saturday morning, blocking traffic on Pacific Coast Highway and filling Main Street for about three blocks.

City officials, police and lifeguards said the crowd was bigger than any they recall in the city.

By late afternoon, lifeguards estimated at least 500,000 had visited the pier and city beaches.

"It's solid people as far as I can see," said former City Manager Paul Cook, who stands over 6 feet tall, head and shoulders over most of the crowd walking onto the pier shortly after its mid-morning opening.

"And that means a lot of people care about the pier," he added.

Cook was chairman of Saturday's festivities.

Residents have waited four years for their landmark pier to reopen. It was closed in 1988 after a storm chewed 250 feet off the end and sent a popular restaurant called The End Cafe tumbling into the sea.

Residents joined city officials in raising funds to cover the \$10.8 mil-

lion price tag of the repairs. Even though the total amount hasn't been reached yet, supporters of the plan to rebuild were celebrating Saturday.

"I feel like saying a yahoo," said Orange County Supervisor Harriett Wieder, who persuaded the Board of Supervisors to donate \$1 million to the project.

The ribbon-cutting allowed the crowd to march shoulder-to-shoulder to the end of the pier and opened a two-day festival called Pierfest '92, which featured concerts, clowns, and classic cars.

The festival continues today.

While the crowd remained heavy throughout the day, police and lifeguards said there were few problems.

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## PIER: Record crowd appears

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"It's wall-to-wall people out there, but it's a good crowd," said lifeguard Mike Bartlett. "The biggest problem we had was a lot of people jumping off the end of the pier."

Those who jumped off the pier swam back to shore safely, he said.

One of the first visitors to walk the pier Saturday was 12-year-old Philip Claire of Huntington Beach.

"It's fun to be part of the crowd," said the boy, who added that the ceremony made him feel proud to be a resident of the city.

"It's like in Washington, DC, people to go see the White House. When they come to Huntington Beach, they come to see the pier," he said.

Merchants were happy with the opening and the crowds it brought to their shops and restaurants.

Paul Wimmer, owner of Maxwell's By the Sea, a restaurant next to the pier, said the closure four years ago cut his business by 20 percent.

"It took us awhile to recover and then the economy hit us," he said. "The opening of the pier is icing on the cake."

Visitors waited as long as two hours for a pier-view seat on his restaurant's terrace, he said.

Among those waiting for the pier to open Saturday morning were Vince and Darlene Lopez, who stood armed with fishing poles, a tackle box and a bucket of bait.

It had been four years since they had seen their fishing buddies, who found other spots when the pier closed for repairs. But one by one they began to show up.

There was Rodney Wilson of Huntington Beach, wearing his characteristic broad-brimmed straw hat. And John Ealey from Midway City brought his cart full of fishing supplies.

Members of the group were ready to take their place on the east side of the pier's end, where they and about 30 others have fished together nearly every weekend for nearly 30 years.

"This is a homecoming for us," said Darlene Lopez. "These people are just like family and the pier is our home."

About an hour later, after officials allowed the crowd to walk to the end of the pier, the fish were nibbling on the line John Ealey had just tossed into the turquoise water.

"It's great to be back," Ealey said. "I feel good."



Bruce Strong/The Orange County Register  
Pierfest '92 drew an estimated 500,000 people to Huntington Beach Saturday for a two-day festival that marked the opening of the landmark Huntington Beach Pier, which had been closed for four years because of storm damage. Authorities said the crowd was bigger than any they recall.