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Illustration in Newport

The American art world has long needed what Newport is now getting, the National Museum of American Illustration. The plucky Laurence and Judith Cutler are opening the institution in Vernon Court, the Bellevue Avenue mansion that the couple bought a couple of years ago.

After an 18-month fight at the city zoning board and in court, necessitated by the complaints of several neighbors worried about crowds, the Cutlers finally triumphed. We never understood how plans for such a quiet but celebrated institution, which will tend to lure polite and often scholarly people, could have been held up so long. After all, this is a big feather in Newport's cap!

The Cutlers present a world-class collection of work by Norman Rockwell, Maxfield Parrish, N.C. Wyeth, Frederick Remington and other giants. Indeed, the museum, apparently the greatest repository of classic American illustration, will quickly become a mecca for those wanting to see the creations of artists who demonstrated that commercial and high-aesthetic impulses can work together for art.

As for the debate about whether fine illustrators should be considered artists, we firmly say yes. There is *obviously* an art to illustration, and great illustration can be great art. So the recent debates about whether Norman Rockwell was truly an artist seem empty. How lucky to have his work and that of his peers close by in a spectacular setting.

For more information about the museum, including hours it is open, call (401) 851-8949; fax 851-8974; e-mail art@americanillustration.org.