

# Battle of the signs

There is something quintessentially Newport about a new dispute involving the National Museum of American Illustration — rich people, mansions, aesthetics, tourists and confusing directions.

The Bellevue Avenue-Ochre Point Neighborhood Association, which refuses to disclose its membership, has been fighting, so far successfully, in the city bureaucracy the museum's application to install a tasteful three-by-four-foot, wall-mounted sign at Bellevue Avenue at the corner of Shepard Avenue.

The problem seems to be that a few neighbors (or just one?) don't want those irritating creatures called members of the public to clutter up the neighborhood by visiting this wonderful museum, with its astonishing, world-class collection. This is utterly unfair, given that the neighborhood already has plenty of signs virtually identical to the one planned for the museum — same size, font, materials and sign maker — pointing to such attractions as The Breakers, Marble House, Salve

Regina University's Pell Center, etc. And we doubt very much that people desirous of visiting the museum could be characterized as rowdy, messy or loud — or even drunk.

What we have here is selective enforcement of the law, which is always an outrage.

And sad because the ban on having a proper sign has led the museum's founders, Laurence and Judy Cutler, to decide against opening it to the public on a general-admission basis for the foreseeable future. Admission will continue to be limited and by advance reservation only. What a shame.

Most visitors to the museum are from outside Rhode Island and need a sign to find Vernon Court, the mansion in which the museum is situated. The museum houses work by Norman Rockwell, Maxfield Parrish, Charles Dana Gibson, N.C. Wyeth and 75 other illustrators. And the collection is growing apace.

It is past time to stop the sabotage, and give the public easy access to the museum.

