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WITH THE KIDS

The Huntington Beach Kite Party has the wind at its back

By Brenda Rees
Special to the Times

THE organizers are adamant about one thing: Don't call this weekend's gathering of kite enthusiasts in Huntington Beach a "festival."

"We don't use the 'f' word," says Dave Shenkman, sponsor for the sixth annual event. "It's a party. We don't have a schedule of events; it's just kite fliers showing off their stuff and having a good time." Taking place on a roped off area north of the Huntington Beach Pier, this airborne convention is by invitation only, but beachgoers will have a front-row seat. And if the aerial acrobatics should prove inspirational, there's plenty of open beach for novice fliers to practice. At an undetermined time, the public will even get an opportunity to join the party as part of a fundraiser: \$20 gets you a kite and a chance to rub elbows with the pros.

Shenkman -- who has owned the Kite Connection shop on Huntington Beach for 25 years -- says the event began years ago with a simple invitation on a popular online kite forum. "I wanted to throw a private party for some loyal customers," he explains.

Well, word got out about the gathering and more than 50 fliers from all over the world showed up on the California shoreline for some altitudinal frolicking. This year, the party expects to draw about 100 local and international kite fliers who will take their dragons, quad lines and box kites to the limit.

In addition to watching colorful creations ascending to the heavens, the public can see stunt fliers demonstrating fantastic loops, spins, dives and spirals with speeds reaching 50 mph.

Sixteen-year-old Alex Herzog, who has been flying kites in competitions for nearly half his life, has attended every Huntington Beach kite party since its inception. This year he plans to synchronize his trick flying demonstration to the music of "Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory." And while Herzog's jerking, diving and spinning kites may appear out of control, there's a method to his madness.

"That's how the music goes," Herzog explains. "You just have to feel it."

HUNTINGTON BEACH KITE PARTY

WHERE: North side of the Huntington Beach Pier, 315 Pacific Coast Highway, Huntington Beach

WHEN: 11 a.m.-dusk Sat. and Sun.

PRICE: Free for spectators

INFO: (714) 536-3630