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Pining for Maine: A celebrity haven

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Maine is wild, beautiful and worlds removed from bustling metropolitan centers like New York City and Los Angeles. So it's the perfect place for frazzled and sought-after celebrities to get away from everything.

Except other celebrities.

Maine has long been an escapist destination for the rich and powerful. More than 100 years ago, the Rockefellers helped make Bar Harbor the tourist mecca it is today. Giant summer "cottages" up and down the coast were built by captains of industry and power brokers.

But today, in a world driven by YouTube and Twitter, the most powerful status may be that of celebrity. The idea of celebrity -- of following them, of being like them, of trying to become them -- drives everything from news publications and marketing efforts to TV programming and pop culture.

Now that most of the tourists have left Maine for the season, it's a good time to take note of some of the celebrities who come back year after year. They've been drawn to Maine enough to want to buy homes here, and to spend their summers and even year-end holidays here.

Here are some of the many celebrities who pine for the Pine Tree State:

JOHN TRAVOLTA and KELLY PRESTON, Islesboro: Travolta has created a lot of buzz during his time as a Maine homeowner. The star of "Saturday Night Fever," "Grease" and "Pulp Fiction" got into trouble with his island neighbors about a decade ago for buzzing the island with his private jet, which he pilots himself. But lately, Travolta and his actress wife Preston ("Jerry Maguire," "Twins") have been lying low. When the couple had a baby son late last year, they told reporters they were glad he was born in time for them to fly him to Maine for Christmas.



Staff Graphic/Michael Fisher

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GLENN CLOSE, Scarborough: Close, a major Hollywood star for years, started coming to Maine when she began dating David Shaw, founder of Idexx Laboratories in Westbrook. The couple wed at Shaw's home on Prouts Neck in 2006 and have resided there since. Known for films such as "Fatal Attraction" and "101 Dalmatians" as well as her recent TV series "Damages," Close caused a local stir in 2005 when she signed up to run in the Beach to Beacon road race in Cape Elizabeth. When it was announced that "Glenn Close, Scarborough" had won the women's 55-to-59-year-old division, folks were amazed. Turns out she had a cold that day and gave her race number to a fast friend.

ABBY, CHRIS AND BOB ELLIOT, Harpswell: Maine has its own royal family of comedy, and they all spend summers in Sen. Margaret Chase Smith's former home near Cundy's Harbor. There's Abby Elliot, currently a cast member of NBC's "Saturday Night Live." Her father, Chris Elliot, was also an "SNL" cast member briefly, was a favorite guest of David Letterman, and has acted in wacky films such as "There's Something About Mary." Chris' father and Abby's grandfather, Bob Elliot, was part of the legendary radio comedy team Bob & Ray.

STEPHEN KING, Bangor: The quintessential local boy makes good -- very good. One of the best-known authors of his time and an icon among horror fans, King's books have spawned movies and TV shows, not to mention inspiring countless authors. King grew up an awkward youth by his own admission around hardscrabble Lisbon Falls, and went to the University of Maine in Orono. He's been in that area ever since, and his home in Bangor has become a bona fide tourist attraction for its haunted-house looks that include bats and spider webs built into the iron gate.

MARTHA STEWART, Seal Harbor: America's favorite homemaking maven has had a summer home in Seal Harbor (south of Bar Harbor) for more than a decade, and has featured the home prominently on her TV shows and in her magazines. It's known as Skylands and was the former estate of automobile executive Edsel Ford. Stewart is known for periodically opening her gardens to the public.

STOCKARD CHANNING, Georgetown: A longtime star of Broadway and Hollywood, Channing is probably best known for playing the tough-talking Rizzo in the original film version of "Grease" (1978). She also had a major role in "Six Degrees of Separation" (1993), and played the nation's first lady on NBC's "The West Wing."

DAVID McCULLOUGH, Camden: First, there's the voice, which you've heard a thousand times narrating Ken Burns' documentaries on PBS. Then there's the unrivaled resume as one of the best-known history writers of his time with works that include "John Adams," "Truman," "1776" and "The Great Bridge." McCullough won Pulitzer Prizes for "John Adams" and "Truman." He and his wife bought a home in Camden a few years ago to be near their grandchildren, and they now split their time between Maine and Massachusetts.

GENIE FRANCIS AND JONATHAN FRAKES, Belfast: Hold onto your hats, "General Hospital" fans: Laura has forsaken Luke for a home furnishings shop in Maine. Sort of. About five years ago, Francis decided to take a break from acting to open an interior design store, The Cherished Home in Belfast. The woman who made "GH's" Laura a household name in the 1980s brought her real-life husband, actor Jonathan Frakes, with her. Frakes is best-known for playing Cmdr. William T. Riker on TV's "Star Trek: The Next Generation." Francis has since gone back to TV soaps, with roles on both "GH" and "The Young and the Restless." But she still owns the store, and she and Frakes still spend summers in Belfast.

KIRSTIE ALLEY, Islesboro: It seemed for some time that Alley really enjoyed having a home on this island north of Camden. The former "Cheers" regular convinced her "Look Who's Talking" co-star John Travolta to buy a house there. And in 1998, when she was divorcing Parker Stevenson (of TV's "The Hardy Boys"), she wanted a Maine judge

to preside over the case, saying she considered Maine home. But now her 3,100-square-foot home is up for sale with a \$2.35 million asking price.

DAVID MORSE, Bar Harbor: Morse is one of those actors ("character actors," they used to call them) who you know instantly by his face but not necessarily by his name. The Bar Harbor summer resident's film credits include "The Green Mile" (based on the writing of Mainer Stephen King), "The Hurt Locker" and "The Rock." He was also a regular on the TV series "St. Elsewhere," and even played George Washington in the film "John Adams," based on the book by part-time Camden resident David McCullough.

TESS GERRITSEN, Camden: A practicing physician for a time, Gerritsen began writing fiction while on maternity leave. Luckily for her readers, she never went back to medicine. Her series of books focusing on Boston detective Jane Rizzoli and medical examiner Maura Isles became the TNT TV series "Rizzoli & Isles."

NOEL PAUL STOOKEY, Blue Hill: The "Paul" of the folk trio Peter, Paul and Mary has had a home in Blue Hill for many years, used occasionally as a seasonal home while his wife worked in Massachusetts. Stookey, who turns 74 in December, was at the center of the American folk movement in the 1960s and remains active as a musician, activist and social commentator. Most recently, he joined the Painters, Players & Poets project, performing in Portland earlier this fall.

JONATHAN EDWARDS, Cape Elizabeth: Although Edwards has lived in Cape Elizabeth for only a short time, he has a long association with Maine. An avid and accomplished seaman, the singer-songwriter best known for his early-'70s hit "Sunshine" has kept his boat at a midcoast boat yard for many years. And he's always enjoyed a large and loyal following here. When it came time to find a new place to live, Maine presented itself as a logical choice.

ROBERT INDIANA, Vinalhaven: Pop artist Indiana had a brilliant career in New York in the 1960s. His most famous work, the "LOVE" sculpture with a tilted "O," made him famous worldwide. He bought a house on Vinalhaven in the 1960s and has lived there as a year-round resident since 1978. Indiana, who turned 83 in September, created a "HOPE" sculpture, with a similar motif to his "LOVE" piece, for the Obama presidency.

DON McLEAN, Camden: If there is a single American of a certain age who does not know the song "American Pie," we'd like to meet that person. It seems impossible that anyone who came of age in the 1970s or listens to classic rock radio today is not familiar with McLean's signature song about the 1959 plane crash that killed Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens and The Big Bopper.

DARRYL HALL, Kittery: Half of the pop-R&B duo Hall & Oates, Hall bought a historic house in Kittery in 2007. The Bray House was built in 1662 and is the oldest house in Maine. In addition to his interest in music, Hall is passionate about antiques and old-home restoration: He's restored homes in London and New York. This fall, he released "Laughing Down Crying" on Verve Records.

PATRICK DEMPSEY, Harpswell: Another local kid who made good. Dempsey grew up in Buckfield, went to school in Lewiston, then ventured out to Hollywood to become an actor/sex symbol. As the so-called "Dr. McDreamy" on the ABC hospital drama "Grey's Anatomy," he makes female hearts race. Back here in Maine, he's also known for founding the annual Dempsey Challenge, a bicycle race that raises money for the Patrick Dempsey Center for Cancer Hope & Healing at Central Maine Medical Center in Lewiston -- which the actor helped start in honor of his mother, a cancer survivor.

RICHARD RUSSO, Camden: A native of upstate New York and a former writing professor at Colby College in Waterville, Russo won the Pulitzer Prize in 2002 for his novel "Empire Falls." It turned out to be a prize for Maine, too: Russo convinced the producers of an HBO film version of "Empire Falls" to actually make the movie in Maine, mostly in Skowhegan and Waterville. The project brought energy, money and a brief moment of fame to the area.

JOAN LUNDEN, Naples: Lunden has been waking up to summer sunrises on Long Lake for more than a decade. Before that, she spent 17 years (1980-1997) waking up the country as a co-host on ABC's "Good Morning America." She began summering in Maine after marrying Jeff Konigsberg, owner of Camp Takajo in Naples. Now Lunden is working during her Maine summers, too: She runs a four-day women's fitness camp on the grounds of Camp Takajo called Camp Reveille. Her website makes it sound pretty darn good: "There are no expectations, but choices galore and Joan is there with you for it all!"

Staff Writer Bob Keyes contributed to this story.

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