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SMARTEN UP  
@ The South Orange-Maplewood Adult School

### **WHY THE BAD-RAP, NEW JERSEY?**

In this hyper-PC era, only two things remain that one can still make fun of: mothers-in-laws and New Jersey.

The overweight, who used to be on the list, dropped off when the blame shifted to high fructose corn syrup. But mothers-in-law are still fair game for stand-ups and send-ups, and so, alas, is poor New Jersey.

It's been called the Rodney Dangerfield of States. Between the "What Exit?" cliché, "The Real Housewives of New Jersey," and "The Sopranos," it don't get no respect.

Of course, New Jersey does have its peculiarities. We love diners -- there are 563 of them. And Taylor ham.. Don't ask. But we also have 1,800 miles of gorgeous shoreline with 11 lighthouses, plus magnificent swamps (Dismal covers 1,240 acres), and our own homeboy Yeti, the fabled Jersey Devil that's been haunting the primal Pine Barrens since 1740 and lent its name to the Jersey Devils hockey team.

Closer to home, New Jersey boasts ***The South Orange-Maplewood Adult School***. Founded during the Great Depression when people had little hope and less money, the Adult School was created by local educators as an independent, non-profit school where ***everyone*** could afford classes that informed and entertained.

***Eighty-three years later***, the Adult School is still fulfilling that mission -- and winning awards for it: at the Millennium, the school was designated a "Local Legacy" by the Library of Congress, no less. And no wonder: there's something for everyone in the curriculum (***watch for the Spring catalog, coming soon to your mailbox***) -- more than 180 classes that draw some 1,600 students every year.

**Plus: there's the children's summer enrichment program**, enjoyed by hundreds of kids and employing local high school students and teachers..

Toss **that** out the next time an out-of-stater makes fun of New Jersey.

You could also mention that New Jersey, unique among the 49 less colorful states in this union, has a law against frowning in public, slurping soup, eating pickles on Sunday, and men knitting while fishing. You could look it up.

So why does the world still love to pick on New Jersey? . A dull lull in a sit-com or on a Broadway stage? Here comes some smug swipe at New Jersey. *Typical:*

**Q:** Why is New Jersey called the Garden State?

**A:** Because *Oil, Petroleum, Nuclear Land Fill, & Toxic Waste State* didn't fit on a license plate.

LOL, I'm not. But New Jersey gets the last laugh. Those smelly oil refineries along the Turnpike give us the cheapest gas in the US. And we don't have to pump it ourselves.

Maybe it's just because cliches die hard. Ask Cleveland, its reputation still singed by the 1969 fire on the polluted Cuyahoga river. And Washington, DC, plagued by a 200-year-old rumor that it was built on top of a swamp. It wasn't. Just feels that way in summer.

Note this: New Jersey may be small -- 7, 354+ sq. miles -- but it's rich, third richest median household income in the US (\$67, 500, just behind Maryland and Alaska).

Geographically rich, too: "Down The Shore," we own a great swarth of the Atlantic Ocean. In mid-New Jersey, rich rolling farmlands grow everything from thoroughbred horses to some of the world's best tomatoes. Then come lakes and mountains, including the mysterious Ramapos up near the NY border.

And how about *The Who's Who From New Jersey?* Frank Sinatra, of course. Born in Hoboken. Bruce Springsteen, "Born in the USA" (read Long Branch, NJ). Jon Bon Jovi, John Stewart, and Martha Stewart, Queen Latifah, Count Basie, Meryl Streep, Jack Nicholson, Jerry Lewis, Kevin Spacey, John Travolta, Stephen Colbert and Whitney Houston.

Plus heavyweight thinkers, shakers and movers like Buzz Aldrin, astronaut; Samuel Alito and Antonin Scalia, Supreme Court judges; Grover Cleveland, US President; writers Stephen Crane, James Fenimore Cooper, Phillip Roth, Dorothy Parker, and William Carlos Williams; and at least one, one-off genius, Albert

Einstein, born in Germany but lived in Princeton (where novelist Joyce Carol Oates still does).

New Jersey can also claim Charles Addams, cartoonist; Alice Waters, the mega-foodie; basketball giant Shaquille O'Neal, and the three brothers who founded Johnson & Johnson in 1886 and gifted the rest of the world with Band-Aids and baby powder.

So, bottom line: why the bad-rap for New Jersey? One theory leads to the little town of Secaucus which teemed with pig farms well into the 20th century. Those pigs, some 75,000 strong, ate well on leftovers shipped across the Hudson from New York restaurants. The problem: when the wind blew east from Secaucus, it smelled even worse than the refineries over by the Turnpike.

The pigs are gone now. In their stead come herds of New York shoppers hogging bargains in the Secaucus shopping mecca, where some 60 stores discount luxury brands.

The Meadowlands itself, once rumored to be the mafia's dumping grounds for people they'd unfriended, now caters to the more sportsmanlike. Top race horses compete at the Meadowlands track. And Giants play their NFL games in the Meadowlands stadium. That's the *New York* Giants, BTW.

And neither seems to care that they're actually in ***New Jersey***.

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