

Jersey Shores

A quiet waterfront community in southern New Jersey boasts the highest concentration of log cabins in the world.

In a state widely known for rampant urban sprawl, the small town of Medford Lakes, New Jersey, comes as a surprising but welcome breath of fresh air. Carefree children ride their bikes to school, families spend time together on the town's many lakes and recreational facilities, and neighbors know each other well and are always ready to lend a helping hand. Although this idyllic existence is far from ordinary in some places nowadays, the most unusual aspect about the town is its abundance of log cabins. Of the 1,500 homes in the community, more than 150 of them are cabins.



This rare log-cabin church (right) is a popular destination for weddings, hosting about 150 a year.



Logs are found in more than just homes in Medford Lakes. Vaughan Hall (below center) and a variety of shops (below right) share the rustic motif.



Top right/bottom right: Cleo McCall photos; top left/bottom left: John S. Flack photos

First established as a resort community in 1927, the borough of Medford Lakes got its start with developer Leon Todd, who envisioned a town made exclusively of log cabins built around the lakes. He passed an ordinance requiring that all new construction must be made of log, and even after many of the summer residents incorporated it as a year-round community in 1939, the log restriction wasn't lifted until the 1950s.

Only 20 miles east of Philadelphia, the tiny community has since flourished as a cozy commuter town. Although most properties are smaller than one-quarter acre, many sit on the shores of one of the town's 21 lakes, and the community's many beaches

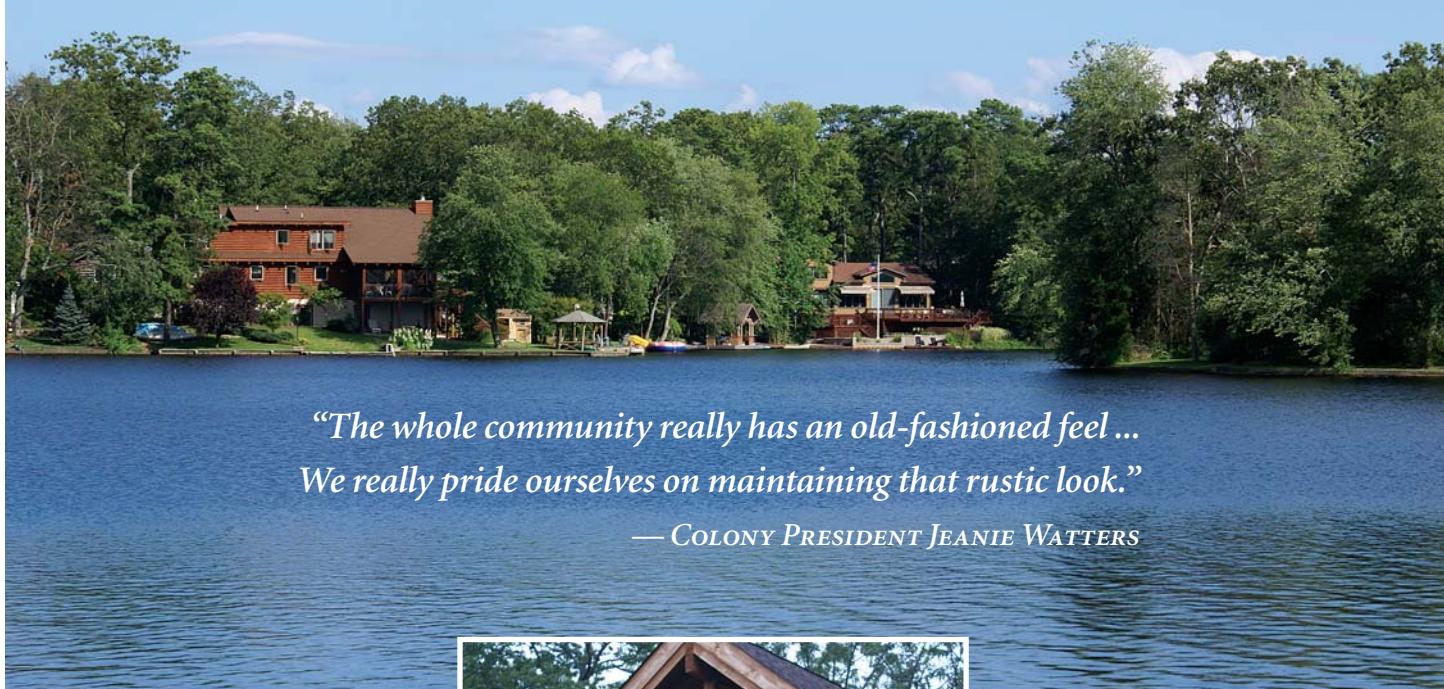
DBench photos

and public areas are shared among the members of the Medford Lakes Colony. "Lakers" — as residents call themselves — are not required to purchase membership in the Colony; however, the vast majority of households buy in each year to take advantage of the privileges Colony membership affords.

Serving as an expanded and highly active homeowners' association of sorts, the Colony maintains and controls access to the lakes and beaches and provides all of the town's recreational activities. During the summer, it runs a day camp that includes nearly all the town's children, and shortly before school resumes in the fall, the Colony holds its wildly popular Canoe Carnival, now in its 80th year.

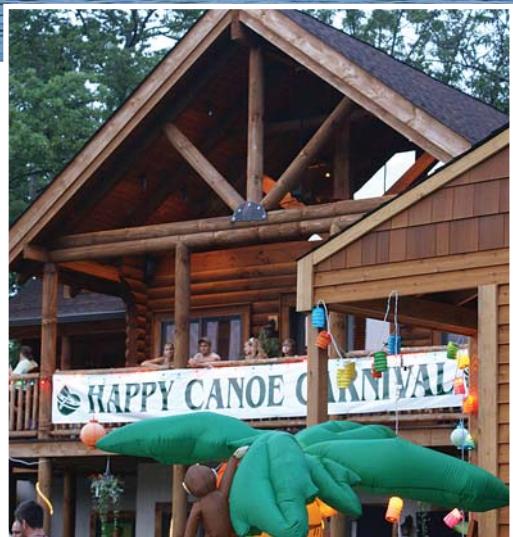
"Medford Lakes is such a unique place," says Colony President Jeanie Watters, who has lived in the borough for 18 years. "The whole community really has an old-fashioned feel, and a lot of the original cabins are still downtown. We really pride ourselves on maintaining that rustic look."

Indeed, the town upholds strict ordinances that regulate what alterations can be made to any of its historic log buildings. Existing log structures can only receive log additions, and new structures in the historic district must be constructed of full or half logs. Any building employing log construction in whole or in part can be demolished only if it has been found to pose an immediate danger to public health or safety, and log structures can only be relocated if no other alternative will allow the structure to be preserved.



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In the annual Canoe Carnival, dozens of groups create hilariously extravagant canoe floats for a chance to win the coveted Grand Prize.

"We try very hard to maintain the historical character of the town," explains borough manager Julie Keizer. Most of the original cabins were built out of cedar, a widely available tree species in New Jersey that resists rot and insulates well.

And it's not just the residences in this area that feature log construction. Many of the community buildings use the ubiquitous building material as well. Vaughan Hall, headquarters of the Medford Lakes Colony, as well as Municipal Cabin, which

houses the borough's operational offices, both feature attractive log construction to keep with the town's rustic aesthetic.

Another enchanting structure is the Protestant Community Church, formerly known as the Cathedral of the Woods. Since it was built in 1931, the quaint log chapel has been a popular choice for weddings and currently hosts about 150 ceremonies each year. And until it burned down in 1998, the town's famed Settler's Inn was heralded as the largest log structure east of the Mississippi River.

Although most residents appreciate the historic integrity maintained by the borough's many log cabins, it's the tight-knit sense of community that keeps families staying put.

"People really do put down roots here," says Watters. "Many kids who grew up here come back with families of their own." She laughs. "My 21-year-old son has already put out notice for which cabin he wants to be his one day." **CBC**