

Celebrity Watch

Orlando, enjoyed by millions of visitors every day, also lures famous residents. A trio tells you why.

By Denise Bates Enos & Kris Hirschmann

YES, MICKEY MOUSE IS Orlando's No. 1 celebrity, followed closely by Shamu and King Kong. Yet, Orlando's also has its share of people making big news. How's this for name-dropping?: golf's Tiger Woods, baseball's Ken Griffey Jr., tennis' Pete Sampras, Victoria Secret's Tyra Banks, plus any of the members from the Backstreet Boys or 'N Sync. Those are just a few.

So what's attractive about Orlando as a place to live, and where do celebs like to go when at home in town? We selected three—a comedian, an actress and a star maker—and got the word from them.

in national publications (*Playboy* being the most notorious) have gotten her real name in the public eye. Mero's upcoming TV series, "The Consultants," and an autobiographical book, "Undeclared," guarantee more of the same. And her web site, www.renomera.com, caters to an unusually large and loyal fan base.

So what's a blond vixen like Mero doing in a place like this? A born-and-bred Florida girl, Mero originally saw Orlando as a place she could pursue her acting career

to mention the large variety of activities and restaurants Orlando has to offer."

Of those activities, Mero singles out Church Street Station, Universal Studios, Islands of Adventure, Walt Disney World and Pleasure Island as her favorites.

"This city can bring out the kid in everyone!" she concludes.



No joking: Comedian Carrot Top says Orlando is good for his hair as well as his lifestyle. Star maker Lou Perlman (left) and actress Rena Mero (far left) agree about the diversity of their chosen hometown.



LOU PERLMAN

DON'T EXPECT TO RECOGNIZE THE NAME. LOU Perlman's job is to make other people into household names. He is the man behind the music of youth bands Backstreet Boys and 'N Sync, as well as newcomers LFO and O-Town.

When asked why he chose Orlando as his base, Perlman says, "The beautiful weather."

He first came to Orlando because, besides the weather, Perlman saw Orlando as an ideal location for Airship International, his

while maintaining a normal life. The world-class airport also was a draw. But Mero quickly came to

appreciate Orlando's many other merits.

"I never realized how much I would enjoy living in this area," she says.

"There is always something to do. The weather is great year round and for someone who enjoys the outdoors as much as I do, that's very important. Not




RENA MERO

RENA MERO IS BETTER KNOWN AS SABLE, former World Wrestling Federation champion. But since her departure from the WWF last year, Mero has been working to change that impression. Guest appearances on numerous TV shows and

celebrities ... and one of Orlando's most visible residents.

To the question of why Orlando, Carrot Top comments, "I always say WHY NOT? I have been to almost every city in the country and only a few offer close to what Orlando has. The weather is awesome. I enjoy the sun and water sports and anything outdoors that doesn't require wearing a helmet, so I can listen to my favorite radio station, Real Radio 104.1. The beach is only an hour away. The humidity is great for my hair, and the people are very friendly. And the BEST thing about Orlando is the attractions. When family or friends come to visit, I can get rid of them for a couple of days so I can enjoy the night life—I look better at night."

Carrot Top also appreciates Orlando International Airport, which he deems "simple and clean." But it could be improved, he says, with "more direct flights to other cities, including a nonstop flight from Winter Park to the attractions so I could avoid I-4 [the interstate] at any cost."

Where does Carrot Top hang out when he's not traveling? "The Sapphire Supper Club is always a good pub with great live music," he says. "To tell you the truth, all the bars along the downtown strip—Zinc, Kate O'Brien's, Latitudes—are great! It's like Disney World for drinkers and the wait is about the same." 

TOP ENTERTAINERS NEXT DOOR

Orlando's year-round sunny skies and world-class golf courses have attracted a slew of professional golfers to the area. In addition to Tiger Woods, local residents include Mark O'Meara, Ernie Els, Lee Janzen, Stewart Appleby, Robert Damron, Fulton Allem, Jay Williamson, Se Ri Pak and Arnold Palmer (part-time resident). Aside from Ken Griffey Jr. and Pete Sampras, others athletes include Tim Raines, Horace Grant, Jim Courier and Shaquille O'Neal (part time).

In recent years, Orlando has exploded onto the national and international music charts. Top-selling pop heartthrobs the Backstreet Boys and 'N Sync are joined by up-and-coming teen sensation Mandy Moore (who sings recent chart-topper "Candy"). Rock groups Seven Mary Three and Matchbox 20 also got their starts here. Notably, Rob Thomas, a local and lead singer of Matchbox 20, both penned and voiced the monster Santana hit "Smooth." The single recently picked up a Grammy Award for Song of the Year. In addition, old-time musicians Terence Trent D'Arby and Jim Messina of Buffalo Springfield, Poco and Loggins/Messina call Orlando home.

blimp operation that advertises various companies above sports stadiums and theme parks. One of his clients, McDonald's, wanted its blimp to fly year round, and, as Perlman puts it, "You can't fly a blimp in cold weather."

Thus, Perlman relocated his headquarters to The City Beautiful and soon began his musical empire. While providing musical celebrities with transportation via his existing charter airline business, Trans Continental Airlines, Perlman witnessed the meteoric rise of New Kids on the Block. He decided to re-enter the music business (as a teen, he played in a band and then unsuccessfully tried for a musical career of his own, inspired by his cousin, Art Garfunkel) and founded Trans Continental Records.

Perlman says he loves the area's theme parks, especially riding the roller coasters at Disney. Disney-MGM Studios' Rock 'n'

Roller Coaster is his hands-down favorite, although he wishes it featured music from one of his bands instead of Aerosmith.

He stays busy with other activities, too. "There's a great atmosphere in town—you can do just about anything: golf, boating, great sports teams and great entertainment."

CARROT TOP

A TANGLED NEST OF curly red hair makes comedian Carrot Top one of the nation's best-recognized