



Swayze became a star in 1987 with his performance as the misunderstood, leather-clad bad boy Johnny Castle in "Dirty Dancing." The coming-of-age romance established him as a romantic leading man. He starred opposite Jennifer Grey as a sexy (and much older) working-class dance instructor at a Catskills resort who proved to have more heart, integrity and sex appeal than many of the wealthy guests with whom he was forbidden to fraternize. The film made great use of both his grace on his feet and his muscular physique. Swayze's 20-month battle with advanced pancreatic cancer ended when he died Monday, September 14. He was 57. The Catskills were once America's largest resort area.

The Catskills have a history as the "Borscht Belt" or the "Jewish Alps" drawing newly-arrived immigrants starting in the 1920s. They rented cheap rooms in farmhouses-turned-boarding houses, commonly called kuchaleins, or "cook-alones," as residents did their own cooking. As the Catskills' popularity grew, some boarding houses became hotels, and other entrepreneurs bought land and built a series of simple cottages that became known as bungalow colonies. According to the Catskills Institute, which documents the role of the Catskills in American Jewish life, the region once boasted 783 bungalow colonies. There were also 1,145 hotels, known for fostering the careers of Henny Youngman and other "Take My Wife, Please"-type entertainers. Some of these historic venues include Kutsher's Country Club, The Concord, Grossinger's, Brickman's and The Nevele.

In the early 1960s, many big Borscht Belt resorts began attracting younger crowds by featuring top pop, jazz, and R&B acts. The Concord presented James Brown; The Pines presented the Byrds, Fabian, and Frankie Avalon; the Raleigh presented the Byrds and Sam Cooke; the New Roxy presented Little Richard; and the Eldorado presented the Drifters, Jay & the Americans, Little Anthony & the Imperials, the Shirelles, and Ben E. King. By the late 1960s, the region was firmly established as an entertainment center for all ages. In August 1969, over half a million concert-goers flooded the Borscht Belt for the Woodstock Music and Arts Fair in Bethel. During the 1970s, Monticello Raceway presented weekly "Rock 'n Roll racing which featured such superstars as Bobby Vinton, Frankie Valley & the Four Seasons, Natalie Cole, and Ike & Tina Turner.

But in the '70s, hotels and colonies increasingly closed up shop. Many of those that remained were taken over by ultra-Orthodox Jews - but a few are being reinvented as affordable rentals. People are returning to the Catskills. The Catskills' convenience to the City, along with rising travel costs, international safety issues and the current economic crisis persuade some to vacation closer to home. **Emerald Forest Bungalows** invites Dirty Dancing and Borscht Belt fans to enjoy the tranquility, natural beauty and entertainment resources of the region. Come for a long weekend, a week or maybe two.