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Fame in Ames

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Dahling, we simply must head to Perkins tonight! Their turkey club is delish, and we can go over ideas for that new script.

We simply have to get Gwyneth or some other Miramax blonde. If Perkins is too crowded, we can always go to Country Kitchen or grab some Greek treats from that lovely little man who sells gyros on the corner. Oh, that's my cell again!

Okay, so the above scenario doesn't happen too often in Ames, a city of 50,000 people where Iowa State University is one of the biggest employers and what passes for hip culture is usually snagged at North Grand Mall.

Let's face it, the state of Iowa isn't the ideal site for hip insider meetings or movie shootings, besides ficks that involve tractors (The Straight Story) or twisters (uh, Twister). But it turns out we have some claims to fame after all. This summer, some celebs were frequenting the same local hot spots that you might be heading to. That is, if you consider Hickory Park a hot spot. Here's the dish.

Han Solo lands in Hickory Park

Most ISU students were away from Ames last summer. Too bad, because one of Hollywood's biggest box-office hunks ate some grub at the biggest restaurant in Ames.

Harrison Ford has been voted America's favorite male movie star, over other babes like Tom Cruise and even Hollywood royalty like John Wayne. Ford, even though he's kind of a geezer now, was even voted People's Sexiest Man Alive a few years ago. It didn't take long for Indiana Jones to be noticed at Hickory Park.

"I saw him standing under the flashing arrow, and I said to myself, 'Oh my god, that's Harrison Ford,'" says Tracy Wheelock, Hickory Park manager.

Even though Hickory Park's barbecue is tasty, Wheelock doesn't know why Ford would stop there. "Why would he come here for lunch at 12:30 in the afternoon when he would be mauling — which he was?"

Although all eyes were on Ford, the man who's battled Gary Oldman on the presidential plane, voodoo priests, and even Darth Vader wasn't about to get nervous being gawked at by the locals.

"He was very nice. He stayed in the lobby for about a half-hour after he was done, taking pictures and signing autographs," Wheelock says. "It's amazing how many people were carrying cameras on them." Ford, who makes about a cool $20 million per flick, was also gracious to the staff. "He was a good tipper, about 20 percent to 30 percent," she says.

Ford isn't the only celeb to have graced Hickory Park. "The Baywatch wedding party came in the day after the wedding," Wheelock says of the fall 1998 union of bathing beauty Traci Bingham and musician Rob Vallier. "LeAnn Rimes was here before she got big."

Of course, any celeb worth his salt wouldn't dare show up with an entourage. "When [New York] Mayor Rudy Giuliani came in, he made the biggest show. You wouldn't have known it was him, except for the 15 bodyguards following him around," Wheelock says.

I swear to God even his credit card said ‘Stone Cold Steve Austin.’

—Quinn Perrin, freshman in liberal arts and sciences

**Stone Cold Close Encounter**

"I swear to God even his credit card said 'Stone Cold Steve Austin,'" says Quinn Perrin, freshman in liberal arts and sciences. Perrin got the skinny on the pumped up, beer-swilling pro-wrestler two summer ago. She didn't have to go undercover, and if you're wondering how she got a glimpse of the big man's plastic, it's not at all unsavory — she was a hostess at O'Malley and McGees. It seems the WWF's biggest draw was in Ames for RAW is WAR at Hilton Coliseum and got a hankering for a little Mexican.

Of course, Perrin took one look at this goateed cool customer and knew he wasn't just another Amesian. "About two people recognized him right away," Perrin says, who didn't waste any time asking Austin if he was famous. Our hero denied the charge. "I said, 'Whatever' and seated him at his table," Perrin says.

Nice try, Stevie. An alert patron went over to Austin's table and asked for an autograph. "I said, 'You lied!' and he just laughed," Perrin says. It was then her turn for an autograph, and Stone Cold said he'd oblige.

"He said that I had a pretty name, and he asked me about my grades in school and stuff," Perrin says. "He asked if I had a boyfriend and I said no, and he said, 'If I were 17, I'd give you a run for your money.' Scandal!

With all this flirting going on, Stone Cold forgot to follow through with the promised autograph. "So I got one of our drink tickets and a purple pen and ran outside. He wrote, 'Hell Yeah!' and I got a hug," Perrin says. Scandal part deux!

**Bowling with Michael Stipe and the Gals**

When the Indigo Girls performed at Stephens Auditorium this summer, they began their evening the way many broke, bored college students spend their time — bowling. Hey, no one can say these Girls put on celeb airs.

Of course, when most of us go to Twentieth Century Bowling, we don't bring along 50 people and take up eight lanes. "I recognized one of them," owner Jeff Bundy says, "but I couldn't place where I had seen her before."

Like any good celebrity spy, Bundy spotted the tour bus in the parking lot and asked the driver who the Girls were. "They were very nice and having a very good time," he says. "They were just like everyone else — out to have some fun."

Actually, Twentieth Century may be one of Ames' hippest joints, at least for people in the music biz. Country star Willie Nelson, new-age master Yanni, and the wacky boys from REM have all been customers of Twentieth Century Bowling, stopping by before or after performances.

"When REM was here, they were pretty cool. [Bassist-guitarist) Mike Mills bowls a lot, and so we talked about bowling," Bundy says. "They were normal people. [Singer] Michael Stipe was a little different, but I expected that." Michael Stipe strange? Who would have thought...

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Tori Rosin is a junior in journalism. She's managing editor of The Drummer, and she's worked for The Daily and a feminist-travel website called Vagabunda.com. She was her brother's phone-in friend when he was on Who Wants to Be A Millionaire last January. He got the question right, too.