

## Au revoir Paris, hello Wolfeboro

### France's president plans N.H. respite

By Lisa Wangsness

GLOBE STAFF

WOLFEBORO, N.H. — France's President Nicolas Sarkozy would not have to stray far from the Champs-Élysées to find a summer holiday spot most Americans can only dream of. A castle in the Loire valley. A country estate in Provence. A villa on the French Riviera.

But *non*.

Sarkozy, his country's celebrated new leader, is planning to get some rest and relaxation on the shores of Lake Winnepesaukee.

Wolfeboro — a popular vacation destination for countless Bostonians — is buzzing with excitement about his visit.

David W. Owen, the town manager, said local public safety officials have met with the Secret Service to arrange security.

"We're used to having notables, although not heads of state — heads of state are a little different class," he said.

It is unclear whether Sarkozy's family is accompanying him or why he has chosen Wolfeboro; local residents interviewed did not know of any previous connection. The timing of his visit is also

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something of a mystery, but a source with knowledge of the trip said Sarkozy plans to arrive in early August and stay for as long as two weeks. A spokesman for the French consulate in Boston declined yesterday to confirm the visit.

If Lake Winnepesaukee's reputation for motorcycles, power boats, and jet skis seems unlikely to attract a sophisticated, cultured Frenchman, Wolfeboro itself is a picturesque small town that retains the charm of early 20th century New England.

"It probably has a little more European feel to it because of the little-bitty stores that have survived — you don't see that anymore in the bigger communities," said Karen Baker, who owns The Country Bookseller on North Main Street. She added that the anti-French wave of a few years back didn't show itself in town much. "No one changed the name of the French fries on the menus up here."

Certainly there are more French fries than fine French restaurants in town, though if Sarkozy gets the urge, he could find a nice bit of Camembert or wedge of brie at Camelot, a downtown book and gift shop that also sells an assortment of French cheeses.

"It would be nice to try them if he would be interested," said owner Al Pierce.

The word around town this week was that Sarkozy — or a proxy — might be renting a former Microsoft executive's 13,000-square-foot lakefront estate. Allan Bailey, who takes visitors on lake cruises, said that last week, he saw at least seven open-deck fast boats, which he believed to be security boats, patrolling the lakefront near the estate.

Mike Appe, the owner of the property, who was out mowing his lawn on Tuesday, smiled but declined to comment when asked about the visit.

Wolfeboro, which bills itself as the oldest summer resort in America, takes great pride in its natural beauty and low-key sensibility, and over the years the town has drawn rich and famous people from all over the world — including Mitt Romney, who owns a summer home a few minutes by boat or car from Appe's mansion.

"I think the town will welcome

him with open arms, but there won't be pressure on him or anything else," said Richard Kendall, a mechanic who owns Weston Auto Body Shop. "Townies leave people alone, they respect their privacy. The townies will give him his distance and let him do as he wishes."

He added that he hopes the visit will bring about "a thawing of tensions between two world powers . . . which we need."

Sarkozy's visit appears to be a private vacation, not a business trip. Still, the world will probably see some symbolism in his American adventure.

Sarkozy has promised to improve French-US relations, which have been strained since 2003, when the French government strongly objected to the US invasion of Iraq.

Back then, France-bashing was common among American conservatives; even the cafeteria at the New Hampshire State House, then dominated by Republicans, briefly renamed its French fries "freedom fries." But since his election in May, Sarkozy has become the darling of American conservatives, who see him as an ally.

Adam Gopnik, who has written extensively about French politics and culture for The New Yorker and in his own books, said yesterday it would be "a huge

mistake" to think Sarkozy idealizes America, but he said the new French president appears to want to "drain the drama" from relations between the two countries.

Asked about the prospect of Sarkozy's visit, Gopnik said he did not know whether Sarkozy had any political purpose in his trip, but if he did, it might be to make it seem "completely normal and



unfreighted that a French president could vacation in America.”

Traffic is normally heavy this time of year in town, but Owen, the town manager, said he did not expect Sarkozy and his security to create major additional delays.

“We suspect when and if he goes out and about, there will be motorcades and some delay that will be experienced by people,” he said. “But there’s already significant delays at times.”

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*Lisa Wangsness can be reached at [lwangsness@globe.com](mailto:lwangsness@globe.com).*

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DAVID W. OWEN  
*Town manager  
for Wolfeboro, N.H.*



BENOIT TESSIER/REUTERS/FILE

**Nicolas Sarkozy is expected at Lake Winnepesaukee.**



GEOFF FORESTER FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE/FILE 2005

**A view of Lake Winnepesaukee from Foley Island. If the lake's reputation for power boats and jet skis seems unlikely to attract a sophisticated Frenchman, Wolfeboro is a picturesque town.**