

## LOCAL-CELEBRITY

### Famous People from Rhode Island: How many of these 50 famous people do you know?

By Katie Landeck, Providence Journal

#### Rhode Island has its fair share of famous people.

It's not just part-time people like Taylor Swift who own a house here but can't lay claim to the title of Rhode Islander. We've got plenty of people who were born here or who have lived here for an extended period, who have gone on to become famous.

Who's the most famous person from Rhode Island? That's hard to determine, but we've compiled a list of 50 famous living people from Rhode Island. Take a look at who they are and their connection to the state.

**Viola Davis** – An EGOT, Viola Davis has won and been nominated for more awards than we have space to list and has become one of Hollywood's leading ladies. She's also well-known for giving back – to Central Falls High School (where she graduated from) as well as other schools in programs in the state.

**James Wood** – A Rhode Island native, 75-year-old actor James Woods still lives in his home state. Oscar-nominated actor and conservative firebrand James Woods graduated from Pilgrim High School in Warwick and lives in Exeter.

**Bobby John Farrelly** – With his brother (see below), he directed and produced "There's Something About Mary," "Dumb and Dumber," "Shallow Hal," "Kingpin," "Stuck on You," and "Fever Pitch." p

**Peter Farrelly** – In addition to the films he worked on with his brother, Peter Farrelly co-wrote and directed "Green Book," which won two Oscars, and is one of the directors of "Lucky Hank."

**Olivia Culpo** – Named Miss Universe in 2012, the Cranston native has gone on to be a well-known public figure, with her reality television show and is a co-owner of several restaurants in the state.

**Meredith Vieira** – Raised in East Providence, Meredith Vieira is a staple on broadcast television. She was the original moderator of "The View," currently hosts "25 Words or Less," and has been on many other shows including "The Today Show" and her own talk show.

**Jim Langevin** – The first quadriplegic elected to Congress, Jim Langevin's first election was to a student government seat in his first year at Rhode Island College. He's currently teaching at the University of Rhode Island and Brown University. He graduated in 1990.

**Demetrius Andrade** – A professional boxer, Demetrius Andrade, also known as "Boo Boo" is a two-division world champion. His nickname comes from being a bit of a daredevil during his time growing up in Providence, where he still lives today.

**Paul Michael DelVecchio Jr.** – DJ Pauly D came and brought the Jersey Shore beat with him to Minerpalooza 2018 Friday night at the Sun Bowl.

His big break was Jersey Shore, but Johnston High School graduate DJ Pauly D has spun that moment into more. Since then, he's been successful as a DJ and is believed to be the most financially well-off of the cast members.

**Carolyn Rafaelian** – Alex and Ani founder and designer Carolyn Rafaelian at the company's Cranston factory in 2011. As the former CEO of Alex and Ani, Carolyn Rafaelian had a meteoric rise alongside the popularity of the company's signature charm bracelet. She's been on Forbes's list of America's Richest Self-Made Women but has since fallen off. Her current jewelry project is Metal Alchemist.

**Pete Wells** – The restaurant critic for The New York Times, Pete Wells grew up in Providence and rumor has it he still has a love for “swirling a steamer clam around in the broth that pools at the bottom of a cup.”

**David Macaulay** – An author and illustrator, David Macaulay has long been driven by curiosity, using his talent for drawing and understanding how mechanical things work to explain it to the rest of us. The Cumberland High School graduate's work includes "Cathedral" (1973), "City: A Story of Roman Planning and Construction" (1974), and "The Way Things Work" (1988). He also illustrated two murals along I-95.

**A.O. Scott** – The longtime chief movie critic for the New York Times, A. O. Scott attended Classical High School. He recently switched to being a critic at large for NYT's book review.

**Sylvia Poggioli** – Sylvia Poggioli, senior European correspondent for National Public Radio's foreign desk, receives a doctorate of Humane Letters hood, honoris Causa, during the 2006 University of Massachusetts graduation in Boston Friday morning, June 2, 2006. University of Massachusetts president Jack M. Wilson places the hood over her head. Poggioli's mother was a professor of literature at UMASS Boston. (AP Photo/Stephan Savoia)

A foreign reporter with NPR for 41 years, Sylvia Poggioli didn't live in Rhode Island for very long, but she was born here, while her father taught at Brown University.

**JVKE** – American singer, songwriter and producer Jvke performs at the Inn Cahoots Outdoors, presented by C23 Live, as part of South by Southwest in Austin, Texas, March 16, 2023.

The Golden Hour singer Jacob Dodge Lawson, known on stage as JVKE, has been rising in the music industry. He's originally from Cranston.

**Danny Smith** – An executive producer, writer and voice actor, Danny Smith is the only writer on “Family Guy” who is actually from Rhode Island. Seth McFarlane just went to college here. Smith went to Smithfield High School and Rhode Island Community College.

**Bob Ballard** – James Cameron and oceanographer Bob Ballard discuss their explorations of the Titanic wreck site for National Geographic's special.

In 1985, Bob Ballard found the R.M.S Titanic, launching him into popular culture. However, the scientist, who is an oceanography professor at The University of Rhode Island, would prefer if we would all remember him for the discovery of the first hydrothermal vents and their exotic chemosynthetic animal communities.

**Ann Hood** – A New York Times best-selling author, Ann Hood was born in West Warwick. Rhode Island is the place she's always come back to, even after a career as a stewardess and growing up in a military family. Rhode Island is ever-present in her memoirs.

**Gregory Zuckerman** – A New York Times best-selling author and an investigative reporter for the Wall Street Journal, George Zuckerman grew up in Rhode Island. His latest book is “A Shot to Save the World” about the creation of the COVID-19 vaccine. Ma

**Don Reo** - A Cranston native, Don Reo is a television producer and creator. Some of the shows he’s been a creator of include “Blossom,” “My Wife and Kids,” and “The Ranch.”

**David Kessler** – Even if you don’t immediately recognize the name David Kessler, you probably are familiar with his work. A grief expert, Kessler, who was born in Rhode Island, worked with psychiatrist Elisabeth Kubler-Ross on the five stages of grief and co-authored two books with her. He’s also written several of his own books, including his most recent the bestselling “Finding Meaning: The Sixth Stage of Grief.”

**John McCauley** – John McCauley of Deer Tick. The band expects to release a new album sometime this year.

The frontman for the alternative rock band “Deer Tick,” John McCauley is a Rhode Islander through and through. The band, founded by McCauley in 2004 with the membership solidified in 2009, got its start playing gigs in Providence.

**Vanessa Carlton** – The “A Thousand Miles” singer moved to Rhode Island in 2021 with her husband, Deer Tick frontman John McCauley.

**Richard Jenkins** – He’s been in over 80 movies, but the Oscar-nominated Richard Jenkins has a funny way of being somewhat anonymous. He came to Rhode Island to join Trinity Repertory Theatre, and he only left once – briefly – before coming back Jenkins lived in Providence, then Cumberland, and then moved back to Providence again.

**Shawnee Taveras** – A singer, Shawnee Taveras is a queen of salsa, awarded the Premio Conga de la Salsa in the Dominican Republic for best new musical act in 2019. She moved from the Dominican Republic to Providence as a child.

**Kim Schifino** – One half of the indie-band Matt and Kim, Kim Schifino graduated from East Providence High School. The band is probably best known for their gold-certified song “Daylight,” which has been used in TV shows, commercials and even in “The Sims 3: World Adventure.”

More:12 graduates from Rhode Island high schools that went on to do big things

**Dale Chihuly** – Not many glass artists become household names, but Dale Chihuly has for his stunning large-scale installations. He did his graduate work at RISD and is credited with starting the glass-blowing program there.

**Debra Messing** – Most recognizable as Grace on “Will and Grace,” the actress started her career as a student at East Greenwich High School. When she received a Pell Award for Distinguished Achievement in 2015 her former high school drama teacher, James Metcalfe presented her with the award.

**Pete Gaynor** - FEMA Administrator Pete Gaynor, packs a box with thermometers at a UPS warehouse on Tuesday, June 23, 2020, in Louisville, Kentucky. The facility warehouses and distributes PPE and other supplies for FEMA. 62,000 feet of the warehouse are dedicated to the distribution of 175 different products used on the front lines during the coronavirus pandemic.

Pete Gaynor, who lives in Jamestown, was the FEMA Administrator during the COVID-19 pandemic, and very briefly in January 2021 served as the acting Secretary of Homeland Security.

**Will Blackmon** – Raised in Cranston, Will Blackmon is a former safety in the NFL. He played for the Green Bay Packers, New York Giants, and Jacksonville Jaguars, to name a few.

**Kevin Lima** – From Pawtucket, Kevin Lima is a director and animator who has worked on some really big movies. He was the director of “Enchanted” and “Tarzan,” a writer for “Aladdin” and worked as an animator on movies like “The Brave Little Toaster.”

**Richard Hatch** – Reality TV star Richard Hatch, center, departs federal court in Providence, R.I., Monday, Jan. 10, 2011. In 2009, Hatch began a three-year period of supervised release under the condition that he refile and pay his taxes on the "Survivor" winnings and other income. The court found Monday that he violated the terms of his supervised released.

The winner of the first season of Survivor, Richard Hatch became notorious as “that naked guy.” Since then, he’s been on several other reality shows and in trouble with the law for tax evasion.

**Frank Caprio** – Municipal Chief Court Judge Frank Caprio. Well-known for his show “Caught in Providence,” Judge Frank Caprio served for many years as a municipal court judge in Providence. He’s known globally as a face for compassionate justice.

**Gina Raimondo** – United States Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo is still better known around these parts as the former governor of Rhode Island. She grew up in Smithfield.

**Jared Haibon** – First a contestant on the 11th season of "The Bachelorette," Jared Haibon is one of the successes of “The Bachelor” franchise. While he didn’t find love that season, in a return to the franchise he met Ashley Iaconetti. It was a bit of a rocky road, but they’re now married.

*More: Do you remember these Rhode Islanders who were on reality television shows? Take a look*

**Omi Hopper** – A delight to watch cook, Omi Hopper started making cooking videos during the pandemic to keep boredom at bay, and then says she kept at it because she loved educating about Puerto Rican cooking. She became so popular as a social media influencer that she landed a spot on season 2 of "Next Level Chef." She made it to the semifinals before being eliminated.

**Wendy Carlos** – A musician and composer, Wendy Carlos is considered one of the most important people in electronic music. From Pawtucket, her accomplishments include winning three Grammys for her album “Switched on Bach” and writing the score for “A Clockwork Orange,” “The Shining” and the 1982 production of “Tron.”

**Jonathan Nelson** – Rhode Island’s sole billionaire Jonathan Nelson, of Providence Equity Partners, lives in Providence and is worth \$3.1 billion, according to Forbes.

*More: RI billionaires club a lonely place. See who's a member.*

**Vinny Pazienza** – A former professional boxer, the 2016 film “Bleed for This” is based on Vinny Pazienza’s journey back from injury. The International Sports Hall of Fame inductee is from Cranston.

**Charlie Day** – Best known as Charlie Kelly from “It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia,” Charlie Day was actually raised in Middletown.

**Joe Mazzulla** – The head coach for the Boston Celtics, Joseph Mazzulla is from Johnston. In high school, he played for Bishop Hendricken High School, and as you might expect he was a standout.

**Jeffrey Osborne** – Born in Providence, Jeffrey Osborne started early in music. His father, Clarence "Legs" Osborne, was a trumpeter who played with the likes of Duke Ellington. In a Providence nightclub, Jeffrey Osborne met the other members of what would become Love Men Ltd. Years later he launched a solo career earning four grammy nominations and five gold and platinum albums.

**Rocco Baldelli** – The manager of the Minnesota Twins of Major League Baseball, Rocco Baldelli started his career in baseball at Bishop Hendricken High School. The Woonsocket native played outfield for the Tampa Bay Devil Rays and Boston Red Sox, until a condition called channelopathy cut his career short.

**Ken Read** – Considered one of the best sailors in the world, Ken Read was named the United States Rolex Yachtsman of the Year twice and has won more than 50 other titles. When he isn't on a boat, he's based out of Newport.

**Mena Suvari** – The youngest of four children, Mena Suvari spent her early years in an old stone mansion in Newport she believed was haunted until her family moved to South Carolina. The actress is best known for her roles in "American Pie" and "American Beauty."

**Elisabeth Hasselbeck** – Another winner of Survivor, Elisabeth Hasselbeck used her success on the show to land a hosting gig on "The View" for 10 years. The Cranston native did a stint on "Fox and Friends" for two years before leaving in 2015.

**Shanna Moakler** – Providence native and 1995 Miss USA Shanna Moakler has been on several reality shows, including "Growing Up Supermodel," "Hollywood Exes" "Dancing with the Stars," and "Meet the Barkers" as the ex-wife of Blink-182 drummer Travis Barker, who is now married to Kourtney Kardashian.

**Billy Gilman** – First in the public eye as an 11-year-old when his single "One Voice" debuted, Billy Gilman has been singing ever since. The Rhode Island native was the runner-up in the 2016 season of "The Voice" and has been nominated for a Grammy twice.

**Elizabeth Beisel** – A three-time Olympian and two-time Olympic medalist, Elizabeth Beisel is a swimmer from North Kingstown. In the 2012 Olympics, she won a silver in the 400m Individual Medley, and a bronze in the 200m backstroke.

**Robert B. Capron, Jr.** – As an eight-year-old, Robert Capron Jr. started his acting career at Trinity Repertory Company. He went on to star as Rowley Jefferson, Greg Heffley's best friend in "The Diary of a Wimpy Kid" movies.

**Credit: Providence Journal 02-01-2024**

***In Addition:***

**Matt Franco** – Mat Franco is an American magician best known for his personality driven, skill-based sleight of hand magic. He gained fame as the first magician to win America's Got Talent, in the show's ninth season. Franco went on to produce and star in his own primetime TV specials on NBC, Mat Franco's Got Magic. Famous for headlining his own show, Magic Reinvented Nightly at the LINQ Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas in the Matt Franco Theater. Magic means something different to everyone. For history-making magician Mat Franco, "it's uncharted territory meant to be explored with respect and reverence." The

Rhode Island -born and Las Vegas-based phenomenon performed his magic for Central Rhode Island Chamber members and guests prior to his win on AGT.

**Harry Anderson** – (1951 - ) Actor and magician. He starred in the sit-com Night Court; born in Newport.

**Nicholas Brown** – (1729 - 1791) An instrumental figure in convincing leaders to ratify the US Constitution; Rhode Island College was renamed Brown University after him.

**George Michael Cohan** – (1878 - 1942) Composer and actor who is called the father of US musical comedy; born in Providence.

**Bobby (Robert Leo) Hackett** – (1915-1976) Jazz trumpeter; born and raised in Providence.

**Julia Ward Howe** – (1819 - 1910) Reformer, writer, and poet that wrote the words to "The Battle Hymn of the Republic"; lived in Portsmouth and Newport.

**Napoleon (Larry) Lajoie** – (1874 - 1959) Baseball player elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1937; born in Woonsocket.

**H.P. (Howard Phillips) Lovecraft** – (1890 - 1937) Author. He wrote the book Necronomicon and was interested in science fiction and supernatural stories; born in Providence.

**Horace Mann** – (1796 - 1859) Known as the father of American public education and served as the first head of the Massachusetts state board of education; graduated from Brown University.

**Samuel Slater** – (1768 - 1835) English manufacturer who built the first water-powered textile mill in 1791 in Pawtucket; migrated to Rhode Island in 1780.

**Gilbert Stuart** – (1755 - 1828) Artist that painted the George Washington that appears on the dollar bill; born in Saunderstown.

**Roger Williams** – (1604 - 1683) He was a Puritan leader and the founder of Rhode Island.