

Nantucket votes to ban big chains from downtown

By Belinda Yu

BOSTON, April 6 (Reuters) - Residents of the wealthy vacation island of Nantucket off the coast of Massachusetts have voted to ban big chain stores from its quaint streets to protect their unique character.

Several hundred island residents decided at a town meeting on Monday to ban any retail or food establishment with standardized decor, menus, trademarks, uniforms, merchandise and color schemes. The ban does not include grocery stores or gas stations and must be approved by the state Attorney General's office.

"As the country starts to look more and more like everywhere else, this was about protecting our uniqueness as a tourist destination," said Wendy Hudson, a Nantucket resident and independent book seller who proposed the ban.

Nantucket, a picturesque former whaling village which figured in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, "boasts of America's most expensive vacation homes. It became the latest in a line of U.S. beachfront communities to ban chain stores.

Carmel-by-the-Sea in California was the first to do so in 1983. Others include Ogunquit on Maine's southern coast known for its beaches and long line of outlet malls a short distance from downtown.

Rob Ranney, a Nantucket resident and real estate appraiser, said high rents have kept chain stores off the island up to now.

"There haven't been any chain stores on the island other than the grocery stores, and that's just been an unwritten rule," said Ranney. "This ban is just making sure that it doesn't happen."

In 1997, a vacant Nantucket lot sold for \$257,000. That same lot is now worth \$1.9 million, according to H. Flint Ranney, owner of Denby Real Estate.

As property values have soared, some local residents have been squeezed out. A March 2006 report by *ForeclosuresMass* shows that from March 2005 to February 2006, foreclosures were up 50 percent from the previous year.