

Maine land essay contest: For \$100 and 200 words, you could own 47 acres in Whitefield

by Kathleen McLaughlin
Coastal Journal contributor

WHITEFIELD — Maybe your dream isn't to own an inn in Maine, but a large tract of land not far from the coast, with hardwood trees, loamy soil, blueberry fields and views of the sparkling Sheepscot River. Turns out, there's an essay contest for that, too.

Edgecomb resident Martha Manchester has launched a new contest to give away 47 acres in Whitefield for just \$100 and a 200-word essay. The contest ends June 11 and a winner will be announced during a live webcast the following day at 7 p.m. She's accepting a minimum of 3,000 applications but no more than 3,500.

"It's rural, but it's centrally located," Manchester said of the land.

The undeveloped property on Route 218 is 22 miles from Bath,

25 miles to Boothbay Harbor, 10 miles to Damariscotta and 18 miles from Augusta. It has more than 1,100 feet of road frontage.

To find it, head out from Wiscasset through Alna, veering left at the Alna Store toward Whitefield and you'll see the big white sign on the left.

Manchester's contest coincides with the widely publicized essay contest for the Center Lovell Inn and Restaurant. In that contest, innkeeper Janice Sage is calling for a 200-word essay and a \$125 application fee. She hopes to garner at least 7,500 applications and announce the winner on May 21.

Sage, who won the property herself through an essay contest back in 1993, has told media that she wants to give someone else the chance to purchase it for a pittance. But she also makes no bones about the fact she's hop-

ing to acquire a sizeable nest egg for her retirement; after all, if she succeeds in reaching her goal, the contest could earn her more than \$900,000, close to the market value of the 210-year-old inn.

Manchester is also very open about her goals. If successful, her contest will generate a \$350,000 payoff, which she admits is far more than the estimated \$150,000 fair market value of the Whitefield acreage. She plans to donate at least \$10,000 of the proceeds to the American Cancer Society in honor of her mother, Evelyn Manchester, who died from bone cancer six years ago.

Like Sage, Manchester hopes the person who wins is someone less fortunate. "I really hope it goes to someone who maybe couldn't afford it otherwise," she said. "I want it to go to a good

Please see ACRES on PAGE 14



Photo by Kathleen McLaughlin

Martha Manchester stands next to the sign on her 47-acre property on Route 218 in Whitefield, which she is giving away to the person with the most persuasive essay and a \$100 application fee.

Maine Land Essay

Clipped By:
k_mclaugh
Jun 8, 2026

14

T H E

Acres

FROM PAGE 2

cause.”

A lobster broker in the Boothbay area, Manchester purchased the Whitefield property in her 20s and paid it off by the time she was 35.

“I wanted to build a road down the middle of it and build a big house and have five kids. But that didn’t happen,” Manchester said. Now, she says, “for personal reasons,” she wants to relinquish the land to someone else.

In no more than 200 words, Manchester said, she wants applicants to describe why they want to own land in Whitefield. “It’s not about the grammar. It’s not about the punctuation. It’s all about what they’re going to do with it,” she said.

The applications have been coming in steadily, Manchester says, with the most unusual so far from a man who says he wants to live in Whitefield because he’s addicted to white fly venom.

“I thought that was pretty funny,” she said. Other applications have dealt with farming or other land uses, including homesteading. “Homesteading is definitely a theme,” she said.

Manchester plans to read through the essays as they come in and make a first cut before handing them over to a panel of judges, which includes State Representative Stephanie Hawke of Boothbay Harbor. The judges will then select a winner and a runner-up, just in

case the winner falls through.

Since the original Center Lovell Inn essay contest in the 1990s, which garnered national and even international attention, property essay contests have been a recurrent trend in the real estate market around the country, with a mix of successes and failures. They’ve sometimes faced criticism for appearing too much like gambling, violating tax laws, or failing to deliver on promises. Maine is considered to have very lenient laws regarding such contests.

Timothy Feeley, spokesman for the Maine Attorney General’s Office, says property essay contests appear to fall outside the realm of Maine statutes, specifically because they are based more on skill than chance.

“From our understanding, they are not intending to draw the essays out of a hat, but are choosing what they feel are the best or most persuasive of the submissions and that would appear to be ‘an application of skill’ intended to overcome the element of chance,” Feeley said.

Feeley encouraged essay applicants to approach the contest like any potential purchase, and ask questions about the property and even the contest itself. “Consumers should always understand what they are paying for before parting with their money,” he said.

Manchester, meanwhile, says she will respond to all questions about the property and contest on her website, mainelandessay.com, where you can find detailed rules and a downloadable application.

BULLWINKLES FAMILY STEAKHOUSE