

President Ford Left His Ski and Golf Legacy at Beaver Creek

By Michael Patrick
Shiels

Michigan's President, the late Gerald Ford, was eulogized very publicly in Palm Springs, Washington D.C., and, ultimately, his hometown of Grand Rapids. It is there, on a shaded hillside along the Grand River, that he lies, beside the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Museum.

While America watched these funerals on television, one is left to wonder why Beaver Creek, Colorado, and, 12 miles to the east, Vail, were left out of the media procession. After all, Ford maintained a home in the area for the last 40 years of his life. I came here, to Beaver Creek, to find out why Beaver Creek was the Western White House for the Republican President Ford, and, his place of solace after losing the 1976 Presidential election to Democrat Governor Jimmy Carter, of Georgia.

Gerald and Betty Ford lived in Beaver Creek for five months of each year; hosted celebrities in an annual charity golf tournament;

ceremoniously lit the Beaver Creek Christmas Tree each year; and served as Grand Marshall for the Independence Day Parade. He served the board of the lovely stone chapel he helped create and worshipped in. More serious business took place here, too, as Ford founded, in 1982, a forum called the American Enterprise Institute, which brought world leaders such as England's Margaret Thatcher, Germany's Helmut Schmidt, and the American Presidents to Beaver Creek. Now, you'll encounter skiers from around the world each

time you ride a Beaver Creek chairlift.

"I don't think anyone did more to put Beaver Creek on the map than Gerald Ford," Harry Frampton, Chairman of the Board of the Valley Foundation, told me as we sat in the Centennial Conference Room of the quaint and classy Inn at Beaver Creek, where Ford hosted an annual reception for the charities which benefited from his golf tournament. In 1981, Ford was one of the founding members of the organization, as Frampton



Art McCafferty films the tribute to President Ford at the Gerald R. Ford Museum in Grand Rapids.

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explained to me as I interviewed him on my radio show. “For over 20 years President Ford never missed a single board meeting. He was there every month. And he was always there on time. He was also very active in contributing to the meetings.”

“What was it like to sit in meetings with a former President of the United States?” I asked Frampton.

“Well, it was very intimidating sometimes. But I wasn’t as scared as my wife. The first time we were invited to a cocktail party at President Ford’s home, she was just as nervous as could be. But once we got to the house, Ford greeted her warmly and asked her at least ten questions about her and her activities. It calmed her right down. He was such a good person that way.”

Ford’s home at Beaver Creek is plainly evident in a neighborhood just up the hill from the ski resort public areas and the Inn. It is not isolated or sealed off in any way, nor was he. Gerald and Betty Ford could be spotted anywhere in town – even grocery shopping in the local Safeway store.

“Of course he always had security agents around him,” said Frampton, “but we all knew them by name. It was very friendly.”

In fact, the only unique feature of Ford’s home are the security quarters bunkered into the hillside across the small yard behind the blue, wooden home. The house is most visible, in fact, by hopping a ride on the Strawberry Park chairlift, just outside the back door of the Inn at Beaver Creek. (Three

support poles up!) In fact, that convenient chairlift is the closest to a hotel anywhere in North America, (about 30 feet) which is reason enough to consider making the Inn your headquarters if you visit Beaver Creek. With only 45 rooms, it’s a homey escape from the hustle and bustle of the village area, yet only about 100 yards from the center of town. Staff members, who remember your name and tend to your needs quickly, make you feel, shall we say, very Presidential. You’re likely to encounter Presidents and CEO’s, business moguls and titans of industry who favor the Inn. When I asked the bartender if many celebrities stay at the Inn, he replied, “Celebrities? No. Our guests are more likely to be the people who hire and write checks to the celebrities.”

After a daily complimentary hot breakfast, that Strawberry Park chairlift, just beyond the wood-paneled ski lockers and out the Inn’s back door, lifts skiers to a potential elevation of 11,440 feet of elevation and 148 trails over 1,805 acres, with challenging moguls, steep sweeping runs through wooded passages, and gentle glides leading to the stylish villages of Beaver Creek, Bachelor Gulch and Arrow Head. The route I took to the Broken Arrow Bar stretched over four miles of varying downhill pitch with majestic mountain views the entire way.

Back in the Beaver Creek Village, you can enjoy outstanding dining at restaurants such as the brilliantly Italian Toscanini just beside Beaver Creek Village’s charming, year-round outdoor ice skating rink, or, near the resort

gate, in Beaver Creek’s original homestead ranch house, a four-star, French, chef-driven gourmet restaurant with magical cuisine and atmosphere. There are romantic “on mountain” dining options as well, such as Beano’s Cabin, accessible only via sleigh ride, or, during the day, you can ski to the festive, themed Red Tail Camp, where the vegetarian chili is a spicy, warm-up option.

Rooms at the Beaver Creek in range between \$200 and \$400 per night; a daily lift ticket at Beaver Creek, which allows skiing from 8:30 a.m. until 4 p.m., costs \$80 for adults. There are various flight options into the Vail or Denver Airports from Detroit, including Northwest Airlines and Frontier, both of which offer non-stops into Denver, which is about two-hour’s drive to Beaver Creek via shuttle bus or rental car. Vail/Eagle Airport is 25 miles from Beaver Creek, and Beaver Creek will give you a free lift ticket on the day you fly in just for showing your boarding pass and Vail Valley lodging confirmation. Visit <http://BeaverCreek.com> to have a look at the various amenities and even book travel (special discounts are available.)

President Ford made Beaver Creek his home; you and your family can be certain to feel at home here, as well.

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