

President Ford, Inc.



By Jerald F. terHorst

WHEN GERALD R. FORD moved into the White House on Aug. 9, 1974, he was practically broke. He had even had to borrow \$10,000 the previous year to meet family expenses. Today, however, he is well on his way to being a millionaire.

Did he make his money while in office? No. Rather, he is going to get rich because he *was* in office.

The American taxpayer is already paying him \$96,500 a year in pensions and footing an estimated \$600,000-a-year bill for permanent private office and staff, jet transportation when he wants it, a chauffeured limousine, Secret Service protection, postage stamps (including those for Christmas cards) and other benefits. But all of this is not enough for Jerry Ford. Commercially speaking, there is no hotter property just now than the former President of the United States. Skillfully packaged and merchandised, Ford — and his family — stand to make as much as \$3 million within the next few years alone.

The greening of Jerry Ford and the former First Family is not unique. All recent ex-Presidents have experienced it to some degree and our other living ex-President, Richard Nixon, is still at it. Opportunities for amassing wealth are everywhere present in this land of free enterprise, and as a private citizen, a former President has as much right as any other American to turn a buck in any legal, legitimate way he can.

Still, a question nags: To what extent should a past President enhance his personal wealth by trading on the fact that he was the nation's Chief Executive? The argument that all Ford's predecessors seem to have done it in one fashion or another does not necessarily make it right or good for the country.

Nevertheless, the Fords have indeed lined up enough moneymaking ventures to turn the former First Family into something of a conglomerate. Here's the tally sheet as of April 1:

- Approximately \$1 million for Ford's agreement with NBC to participate in one to two television documentaries and special news events each year for the next five years, plus granting NBC first option on airing portions of his White House memoirs.
- An additional half-million dollars for Mrs. Ford for participating in two NBC television shows during the next two years on topics that are dear to her: modern dance, mental health, cancer research. She also will earn money for periodic appearances on the NBC "Today" show commencing later this year.
- Another \$1 million from Harper & Row and Reader's Digest, which will jointly publish the memoirs of Jerry and Betty Ford in separate books in 1978 and 1979.
- An annual salary of \$35,000 to \$40,000 for Ford, office space and expenses from the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative "think tank" in Washington. Ten campus appearances at seminars and conferences, worth approximately \$100,000, have already been arranged for AEI's first-and-only "Distinguished Fellow."
- Approximately \$50,000 a year, plus office space and expenses, for serving as the new president of the Eisen-

hower Fellowships, a scholarship program for top students that was established by businessmen and educators in 1953. Atlantic Richfield Chairman Robert Anderson, a prime mover in the program, was instrumental in arranging Ford's role.

The above items are by no means all that the former President will be doing in the next few years. If he wants to make still more money, he can, if he wishes, snap up one or more of the lucrative commercial and corporate offers being dangled before him by some of America's biggest firms — and some of these amount to little more than adorning a company's board of directors or serving as a "consultant." However, Ford, who had no business experience in private life, has thus far turned aside all such propositions.

In Dad's Footsteps

EVEN THE Ford children are cashing in on their First Family identities. Jack Ford, the second son, has lined up a job as assistant to Jan Wenner, the publisher of Rolling Stone magazine. Jack, a forestry graduate, will get an annual salary reported to be more than \$30,000 to assist in the formation of a new outdoor magazine catering to back-packers.

Steve Ford, the youngest son, is going to star in a TV rodeo film for \$30,000.

Susan Ford, a talented photographer and student at the University of Kansas, has already sold to Good Housekeeping magazine for unspecified "thousands" a portfolio titled "White House Scrapbook," a collection of intimate family scenes.

Jerry Ford's chance to make a bundle began last Nov. 2, the day he lost the election to Jimmy Carter. Clouds of defeat only briefly obscured the Ford rainbow. When it

reappeared, there, offering the pot of gold at its end, was Norman R. Brokaw.

Brokaw, 49, is a hotshot talent salesman for the William Morris Agency, one of the biggest in the theatrical and entertainment world. Among Brokaw's clients have been Loretta Young, Marilyn Monroe, Mark Spitz and John Denver.

As Ford aides tell the story, Brokaw was first introduced to President Ford last September by Don Penny, a comedian and a former Brokaw client who had joined the White House staff for the express purpose of enlivening the wooden Ford prose and speaking style. Brokaw instantly sensed the potential for him and for the William Morris Agency to get in on the ground floor of a very lucrative arrangement. Once Ford ceased being President, Brokaw and the agency stood to make 10 per cent on every deal they could work out for him in the fields of publishing, TV and advertising.

By letter and in person, Brokaw managed to win Ford's confidence during the next few months. When the election results were in and it was clear that Ford was heading into private life, Brokaw and the William Morris Agency had a clear lead over all other hucksters

angling for the property. The President spent some time thinking about the William Morris offers during his post-election vacation at Vail, Colo., and in December he gave Brokaw his okay — but insisted that no deals could be signed until after he left the White House on Jan. 20.

“He’s a National Treasure”

APPARENTLY, it was Jimmy Carter’s complimentary words about Jerry Ford in his Inaugural Address on Jan. 20 that set NBC’s brass to thinking that the former President could be an on-the-air asset. Shortly thereafter, the million-dollar pact was worked out for

Ford by Brokaw and Dean Burch, the former White House counsellor and Federal Communications Commission chairman who is Ford’s personal attorney.

Since leaving the White House, Ford has had more than 3,600 bids for his services. “He’s a national treasure,” says Robert Barrett, a former White House military aide who now is Ford’s chief assistant.

Lawyer Burch, who went over the contracts and proposals line by line, says he’s confident that the Fords haven’t sold out to media merchants. His clients, he insists, “will retain the final say on what they will and won’t do on TV and in the books.” But Burch also has a grudging admiration for the “hard-nosed” agents of William Morris. “When it comes to driving a hard bargain, it’s almost shameful the kind of money they demanded.”

The former President’s friends are divided over his money-grubbing appearance. Robert Hartmann, the former White House counsellor, says he has heard no complaints and would advise Ford not to pay attention to any that arise. “Other former Presidents have made money doing the same thing,” he said. “Why not Ford?”

“It’s the free enterprise system,” observed L. William Seidman, White House economic policy coordinator under Ford and himself a millionaire associate of the international accounting firm of Seidman & Seidman. But Seidman added, as have some others, that Ford’s financial deals may turn out to be “a terrible political mistake” if he decides to run again for the presidency in 1980 and then must defend everything he says in his books and on television.

Jerry Ford clearly senses no indignity or impropriety in reaping the fat rewards that will come his way by virtue of having served as 38th President of the United States, and an accidental one at that. But he is sensitive about it.

“It’s a private matter,” Ford said. “I’m a retired public official and I don’t intend to discuss it. I have certain areas that are private now that weren’t previously.”

Of his many ventures, Ford insisted that “as long as they are constructive, I will do them. The money side is for my agent to work out, and if the money comes, fine.” Then he fell back to the Maginot Line of defense used by all past Presidents and government bigwigs whenever the question is raised about converting experiences in public office into private gain. “That is what the free enterprise system is all about,” Ford declared.

A Higher Standard

WELL, YES and no. One expects the Nixons, the Deans, the Colsons and others to look upon their years as public servants as a lode ready for mining. We may even cluck our tongues while rushing to the book stores to buy the latest works of those who turn government memoranda into private memoirs for handsome profits.

On the other hand, many of us expected honest, decent Jerry Ford to set a higher standard for ex-Presidents than has been the case in the past. All this huckstering and hustling and merchandising of the presidency — with Ford’s eager assent — robs the office of something fine and decent.

Ford, after all, has not been a rich man and, as far as anyone could tell, never hankered for big money. He and his family lived modestly but comfortably for 25 years on his congressional pay and outside lectures. According to the House and Senate committees that investigated him at the time of his vice-presidential nomination in 1973, Ford’s gross income had averaged approximately \$75,000 a year since 1967. His net worth was set at \$256,000, most of it in the value of his home in Alexandria, a two-family rental dwelling in his Michigan congressional district and a vacation condominium in Vail, Colo. As the new Vice President, his income actually dipped because of the absence of lecture fees, requiring Ford to borrow \$10,000 from the Old Kent Bank in Grand Rapids, Mich.

I asked Ford whether he felt that his \$66,000-a-year presidential pension was insufficient to maintain a suitable lifestyle. Not at all, he replied, “especially with the congressional add-on” — the approximately \$30,500 he will receive for life as a pension for his years in Congress.

And that’s not all.

Without cranking in the special six months’ transition money and office staff he gets, the Fords will receive lifetime emoluments that surpass those provided by most other governments for their former leaders.

He will receive \$96,000 annually for life for staff expenses and a handsome office fully furnished and maintained by the General Services Administration wherever he designates. He will be able to send nonpolitical mail anywhere in the United States, at no cost to himself and at full cost to the taxpayers. And his lifetime Secret Service protection, by the way, amounts to a great deal more than mere bodyguarding. To do its job properly, the Secret Service provides him with a limousine, drivers, round-the-clock telephone and signal communication services. Agents consider it good duty; to stay in favor, they don’t mind running errands and doing other tasks in the process of taking care of a former President.

Moreover, so long as his trips aren’t political, Ford will be able to count on the use of one of the Air Force’s executive jets to take him wherever he wishes. And when politics is involved, he can usually count on using somebody’s private airplane. In short, he can travel in style without spending a dime of his own money.

Until 1958, there was no presidential pension. Unless he was already wealthy, a former President had to

scrounge around as best he could. For the first five years of his retirement, Harry Truman had little choice but to market his memoirs in order to make ends meet. Even so, he stoutly refused high-paying job offers from private industry and other opportunities to trade on his position as a former President. Why did he resist?

"They were not interested in hiring Harry Truman, the person," he told daughter Margaret. "It was the former President of the United States they wanted. I could never lend myself to any transaction, however respectable, that would commercialize on the prestige and dignity of the office of the presidency."

Harry Truman was one of Ford's heroes when he moved into the White House in 1974. It's a pity that Truman didn't remain a model when Ford left office this past January. That "nice guy" image of Jerry Ford is getting harder and harder to see behind that pile of money on his Palm Springs doorstep.

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