

Ford's Buddy in 'Kitchen Cabinet'

By Vera Glaser

Washington

Nixon had Bebe Rebozo. Lyndon Johnson had Jack Valenti. Jerry Ford has Bill Whyte.

"A President of the United States needs a kind of close guy he can go to," said tall, easy-going William G. Whyte, a U.S. Steel vice president, at whose home six Ford intimates held their first pre-transition planning session two nights before Ford was sworn in.

Whyte, 58, claims he's not the least interested in a job at 1600 Pennsylvania avenue.

"I can be more useful from the outside," he said.

Whyte is a sounding board, a sometime political confidant and a source of intelligence for Ford on the views of business leaders.



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WILLIAM WHYTE
No job hopes

While not registered as a lobbyist, Whyte employs two men who are.

He belongs to what is informally tagged Ford's "kitchen cabinet" — the handful of political and personal intimates who have counseled "Jerry" since his days in Congress.

They are the new President's inner circle and, as such, will be moving into the limelight.

During two decades of intimacy, Whyte has found Ford "hard as a rock, a leader on the Hill who could deliver votes. He's not jarred or frightened by all this. He's rugged and self-confident, but sensitive to people's feelings and loyal to his friends."

Whyte dismisses as "a lot of guff" Ford's non-intellectual image. "He was in the upper fourth of his Yale Law School class while working his way through as assistant football coach. Any

one who can do that is no dummy."

Whyte, a native of Chicago, holds a degree from the University of Illinois School of Commerce. He served in the Army in World War II, emerging as a colonel, and has been with U.S. Steel since 1946.

His wife, the former Margaret Paine, is a Navy "brat" from Texas. Their two sons, are also good friends of the Ford children.

"Jerry and Betty haven't changed an iota," Whyte said, when asked to predict what the nation's number one job will do to the friendship.

"I expect we'll still see them a good bit, perhaps under more formal circumstances, but I doubt we'll be able to vacation together now."