

# Hometown Exults in

By WILLIAM K. STEVENS

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GRAND RAPIDS, Mich., Aug. 9 — Out the phrases rolled, crackling imperfectly from behind the 12-inch screen of the television set amid the stacks of paper and the accounting machines in the offices of the Ford Paint and Varnish Company, a concern run by a brother of the new President of the United States.

"Truth is the glue that holds government together," said the newly inaugurated President. And, "Honesty is always the best policy in the end. And, "Let us restore the Golden Rule to our political processes."

Copybook maxims. Bland clichés in some times and some places. But not, at this juncture in history, to many Americans, and especially not in this city, where old-fashioned virtues not only survive, but prevail.

When the new President's words died away, Debbie Urbon, an office worker, cradled her chin on her interlaced fingers and sighed pleasantly. Nothing more ostentatious than that. That is mostly the way Dutch-dominated Grand Rapids—where to be demonstrative and flamboyant is commonly frowned upon—generally recated to the accession of its most-famous son.

## Mutual Revelation

Here and there a small smile as a citizen picked up a newspaper that told the story. Little gatherings before television sets. Quiet pride not only in the rise of the hometown boy, but also satisfaction that through him, the style and values of Grand Rapids seemed to have become so welcome, so central, so refreshing to the national life.

Grand Rapids tells much about President Ford, and vice-versa. Not long ago, an old acquaintance of the new President mentioned the fact that many people, reacting to Mr. Ford's blandness, assumed that he wasn't too bright.

## Local View of World

Not so, said the acquaintance, "Jerry fools you," he said. "That's just the way people come on around here."

And United States Representative Richard VanderVeen, who last February shattered a 64-year string of Republican victories by winning the special election to fill Mr. Ford's former seat in Congress, says simply that "being sharp" is not particularly regarded as a virtue in these parts. Honesty and straightforwardness, he said, are more important.

It is a set of values that for many Americans seems to have taken on a new urgency and meaning when viewed against the background of events that led up to Richard M. Nixon's down-

fall and Mr. Ford's elevation to the Presidency.

What might be called the Grand Rapids view of the world is rooted in the austere Calvinistic religion of the Dutch Reformed Church.

The nation's biggest concentration of Dutch-Hollanders, as they call themselves—lives in and around this city of 197,000 people, the second-largest in Michigan, set in rolling hills in the southwestern part of the state 25 miles inland from Lake Michigan.

Here along the banks of the Grand River, where fishermen catch chinook salmon right in the middle of town during the fall spawning runs, it is the Dutch who set the moral and political tone.

It is true that Italians, Russians, Latvians, Germans, Poles, Czechs and blacks (the latter make up about 12 per cent of the population), form a diverse ethnic mixture.

## Balance Clearcut

Working first in the furniture factories for which Grand Rapids was famous, and then in the auto plants, once the furniture companies moved South in search of cheaper labor, the ethnics and the blacks formed, in political terms, a traditional Democratic minority.

It was the Hollanders whose traditionally austere, undemonstrative, straight-arrow view of life has dominated public affairs, nourishing and strengthening an ordinary Middle Western conservatism into a unique substrain of orthodox Republicanism that sustained Mr. Ford unfailingly during his quarter of a century in Congress.

The winds of modernity and change blow as strongly in Grand Rapids as they do everywhere else. The Calder Stabile, a gigantic, orange, outdoor sculpture, strikingly sets off the sparkling new buildings of Vandenberg Plaza, the government center.

Adult movies are here. Bars and liquor stores, once anathema to the Calvinistic Dutch, abound.

## 'He's the Best'

Nevertheless, the Christian Reformed Church is probably the single most influential institution in the area, and it is from this wellspring that the emphasis on honesty, straight dealing and Christian charity springs. "It's great to be a Christian," is not a rare bumper sticker here.

Nor is it unusual to encounter on the red-bricked Monroe Street Mall in downtown Grand Rapids a man like 66-year-old Edward Oudersluys. Today he glanced at President Ford's picture on the front page of the Grand Rapids Press in a sidewalk vending machine, turned around and announced: "He's the best."

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# Ford's Reflection of It's Virtures



United Press International

Someone put a patch on sign in Michigan to change Mr. Ford's title from Vice President

With God's help, he'll be all right."

What did Mr. Oudersluys think Mr. Ford's best qualities were? "His trust in God," Mr. Oudersluys answered without the slightest hesitation.

#### Some Disagree

Not everyone in Grand Rapids and environs is a Ford admirer. "I think he's a creep," said an 18-year-old high school graduate who has just hitch-hiked back from Lansing after searching for a job.

"He's gonna be in the same boat as Nixon," volunteered Sam J. Noah, an Ottawa Indian who said that Ted Kennedy was his man and that there were "19,000 Democrats in my tribe alone."

But commonly, even the blacks—not normally the constituency of many Republicans — speak well of Mr. Ford. "He's 'Mr. Clean,'" said Arthur Weeks, a 54-year-old black who does more for the poor people than Nixon did."

"I think he can do the job," said Tom Schackelford, a 22-year-old black who added that most of his neighbors in a predominantly black part of town did, too.

Bruce H. Griffin, retired, said that he didn't know how Mr. Ford would do as President, then added, "If he's only kind of honest, that

would be an improvement, wouldn't it?"

But Debbie Urbon probably spoke for many of her fellow twonspeople: "It seems funny to hear them call him Gerald Ford, let alone President Ford. Everyone here calls him Jerry. With Jerry being President, it's like the Government is coming back to the people."