

A Poignant Surprise Party at San

By Vera Glaser

Washington

Richard Nixon's close chums surprised him last week at San Clemente with an unpublicized birthday party, described by one of them as "poignant, but happy."

Millionaires Bebe Rebozo and Robert Abplanalp, whose names were household words during the Nixon presidency, were there, as were Abplanalp's lawyer, William Griffin, author Victor Lasky and Miami restaurant owner Sol (Cye) Mandel.

Lasky confirmed reluctantly that the men flew from various parts of the country to be with Nixon January 9, when he turned 62, but emphasized that "it was completely off the record. Nobody knows. The President said it was the biggest surprise of his life."

Nixon, who has been seriously ill with phlebitis and virtually in exile since he was forced from office in August, was described as "very frail, his face thin, the nose more prominent."

But Lasky said Nixon "vivaciously" poured drinks and offered his guests caviar sent by the Shah of Iran.

"I don't like the stuff, but he forced it on us like a Jewish mother, saying we'd insult the shah if we refused," Lasky chuckled.

Rebozo, who was Nixon's constant companion during the White House days, was said to be in high spirits, flourishing a recent issue of the Miami Herald. In it former special prosecutor Leon Jaworski was quoted as expressing doubts that a case could be made against Rebozo, who served as a funnel for campaign money.

"Bebe showed the story to



ROBERT ABPLANALP
An unusual apron

the President. It said they had nothing on Bebe. It made us all feel good," Lasky said.

He called it "a happy evening, but one of the most poignant experiences of my life. We told jokes and kidded around like the old days, making ridiculous cracks. If it had been on tape, we'd all have been arrested!"

The faithful friends visited with the Nixons from about 4 o'clock in the afternoon until 9 p.m. The subjects of politics and Watergate were avoided.

Former First Lady Pat Nixon, with whom Rebozo and Abplanalp cooked up the surprise, was described as "looking better than I have ever seen her, just bubbling. She spends time in the the garden."

Lasky was writing a book on Nixon at the time of his resignation and is still at work on it.

Aerosol king Abplanalp often entertained Nixon and Rebozo at his island hidea-



VICTOR LASKY
Aversion to caviar

way on Grand Cay in the Bahamas. Abplanalp owns land adjoining Nixon's San Clemente estate.

In their dining room, the Nixons presided over a steak dinner, starting with stone crab brought by Mandel, who once owned the Hasta restaurant in Miami, a favorite Nixon haunt. There were Cuban beans made from Rebozo's recipe, chocolate cake and Rebozo's favorite macadamia nut ice cream.

After coffee, the group moved to the living room with its high arched windows overlooking the Pacific for a small blizzard of humorous gifts, including candy and books.

They were said to be convulsed when Abplanalp handed Nixon an apron reading, "I got my job through the New York Times."

Lasky gave Nixon a blue necktie, which the former President said he would wear on television. It was

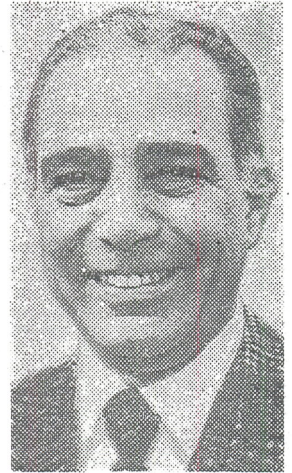
Clemente

not clear whether he was serious.

During the party Nixon took birthday calls from, among others, Robert Finch, who served in Nixon's Cabinet and the White House, former Governor Ronald Reagan, daughters Tricia and Julie and son-in-law David Eisenhower.

President Ford had telephoned Nixon earlier in the day.

"The President (Nixon) didn't look good to me," Lasky said, "but those who see him more often than I say he is improving. It was obvious after a while that he was very tired but he didn't want us to leave. Finally Bebe called a halt.



BEBE REBOZO
In high spirits

"It was a good, human, wonderful evening. No matter what happened, we love the man — and that's why we went out there."