



The Fords' former vacation home is visible from the Strawberry Park chairlift.

WHERE PRESIDENTS PLAYED

PRESIDENT GERALD FORD'S BEAVER CREEK RESIDENCE IS NOW A SHORT-TERM RENTAL

WHEN PEOPLE WALK into President Gerald R. Ford's former home, one of the first things they see is the 18-inch, granite presidential seal engraved into the limestone hallway floor. Oddly enough, it wasn't always there; Kevin Hayes, president of West Point Investment Corporation, installed it during his renovation.

"The president would never do that; he was just too humble," Hayes says. But Hayes wanted to honor Ford. "When you walk in and see the presidential seal, it's a wow moment. You realize who used to live here."

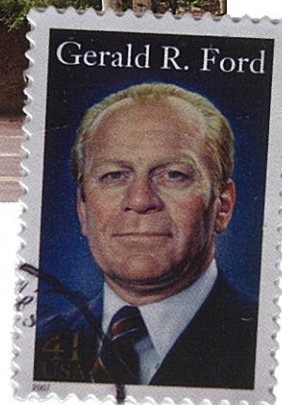
Ford and his wife last visited their Beaver Creek home, which they built in 1983, in July 2006. Ford made the trip from his home in California against doctor's orders because he wanted to take in Beaver Creek's mountain views one more time, Hayes explains. The combination of Ford's heart condition and the high elevation caused him to leave abruptly and check into the Mayo Clinic, where he received a stint;

after that, the Fords decided to sell.

Though that year the Vail Valley lost what Beth Slifer, of Slifer Designs, calls the valley's No. 1 citizens and "our First Family," their home at 65 Elk Track Court still remains for anyone to short-term rent through Triumph Mountain Properties.

Hayes transformed the once separate-entrance apartment where

HAYES TRANSFORMED THE ONCE SEPARATE-ENTRANCE APARTMENT WHERE SECRET SERVICE OFFICIALS STAYED INTO A BILLIARD AND GAME ROOM.



secret service officials, as well as the president's and first lady's secretaries stayed, into a billiard and game room. Visible from the Strawberry Park chair lift, it now houses one of Ford's blue ski jackets and a pair of his K2 skis. Hayes said people could always tell when the president was in Beaver Creek because the secret service's black automobiles always backed into the driveway for a quick escape.

Before Hayes purchased the home, rumors spread about the freestanding structure in the back of the home; people said that's where the secret service stayed, walking to and from the main home through tunnels. As it turns out, there are no tunnels, and the

separate structure houses Ford's lap pool, where he unfailingly swam twice a day, while Betty rode her stationary bike, located next to the pool.

Though Hayes updated the home extensively (for example, he nearly doubled the size of the kitchen), he preserved certain items. The Fords owned two dining room tables — a small one for the two of them, and a larger one for entertaining. Hayes refinished the larger one, which hosted distinguished guests such as Presidents Bill Clinton and George Bush, Vice President Quayle, and Henry Kissinger, and it now sits in the kitchen.

But perhaps the most notable historical part of the home hides under a rug in Ford's original office. Hayes replaced the flooring but preserved a 3x5-foot area of the original, tan, 12" by 12" ceramic tile, which bears the marks of Ford's chair, where he rocked back and forth and scored the tile.

"It's like a mini-museum," Hayes says, "with a great family vacation component to it." — **KIMBERLY NICOLETTI**