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USPS Honors Betty Ford

Stamp Celebrates the Former First Lady's Life and Legacy of Candor

RANCHO MIRAGE, CA — Today, the Postal Service issued a commemorative stamp celebrating the life of former First Lady Betty Ford on the campus of Eisenhower Health, adjacent to the Betty Ford Center in Rancho Mirage, CA. She was the wife of Gerald R. Ford, the 38th president, and widely admired for her support of women's rights and her candor about the serious health challenges she faced.

The stamp was dedicated by Amber McReynolds, vice chair of the Postal Service's Board of Governors. Also attending were Susan Ford Bales, Betty Ford's daughter; Marty Massiello, CEO of Eisenhower Health; Dr. Joseph Lee, president and CEO of the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation; and Tessa Voss, also of the foundation.

"It is fitting for the Postal Service to honor Mrs. Ford this way, because she was an outspoken and enthusiastic supporter of women's rights and aspirations. Our organization has a proud record of providing opportunities for women throughout its history," said McReynolds. "The first female postmaster, Mary Katharine Goddard, took office in Baltimore all the way back in 1775, and today, more than half of all postmasters are women."

"With this magnificent stamp, the Postal Service and the American people pay tribute to a woman of extraordinary courage and candor, to a transformative first lady, and to a devoted wife," said Bales. "In so doing they honor a woman that, today and in my every tomorrow, I am so proud to call Mom."

"There are times when courageous people stand up and change the conversation for America. Betty Ford

did that for both breast cancer and addiction — replacing shame and isolation with dignity, community and equitable care,” Lee said. “Thanks to her, millions of people in this country felt seen for the very first time. And that is why Betty Ford is a national treasure, and why all of us feel inspired for a lifetime to carry her charge.”

Ford was born Elizabeth Anne Bloomer on April 8, 1918, in Chicago. At the age of 2, she moved with her family to Grand Rapids, MI, where she spent her childhood. Young Betty began dancing at the age of 8 and excelled, moving to New York City to study under the legendary Martha Graham and joining her troupe to perform at Carnegie Hall. She returned to Grand Rapids and married William C. Warren in 1942, divorcing him in 1947.

A couple of months after her divorce, she began dating a local lawyer, Gerald R. Ford. They married on Oct. 15, 1948, while he was running for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. Three weeks later, he won, and the couple would spend the next 28 years in Washington, DC. They welcomed four children from 1950 to 1957.

Gerald Ford rose to the role of House minority leader in 1965. On Oct. 10, 1973, Vice President Spiro Agnew resigned, and two days later, Ford was nominated to replace him, assuming the office on Dec. 6. As the Watergate scandal deepened, President Richard Nixon resigned on Aug. 9, 1974, making Gerald Ford the first U.S. president who had never been elected president or vice president.

The self-assured new first lady quickly ingratiated herself to the American public through interviews displaying her humor and characteristic frankness about controversial issues.

After being diagnosed with breast cancer, Ford underwent a mastectomy on Sept. 28, 1974. While the medical issues of previous first ladies weren't always disclosed, Ford chose to share the story of her operation for the once-taboo medical condition. The awareness she brought caused a spike of self-examinations leading to a rise in reported cases that became known as the “Betty Ford blip.”

Ford fought openly for women's rights, often conflicting with the stances of her husband's Republican Party. She campaigned tirelessly for the Equal Rights Amendment, which would have mandated constitutional equality for all Americans, regardless of gender. The first lady wrote letters, called senators and representatives, and traveled across the country to lobby for the amendment's passage. She persuaded her husband to appoint more women to his administration than any previous president and lobbied him to appoint the first woman to the Supreme Court or as his running mate. “I do not believe that being first lady should prevent me from expressing my views,” she said.

Ford began taking prescription pain pills for a pinched nerve in her neck in 1964 and, over time, developed a substance use disorder that involved misuse of her medication as well as alcohol. In 1978, she entered the Naval Regional Medical Hospital in Long Beach, CA, for treatment. As with her breast cancer, she publicly acknowledged her illness, putting a face to the disease and forever changing the American public's perception of the issue.

In 1982, Ford and Leonard Firestone, a former ambassador and family friend, established the Betty Ford Center substance use disorder treatment center, which is now part of the nonprofit Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation. She agreed to lend her name to the center, hoping to destigmatize substance use disorder treatment at a time when it wasn't spoken about openly — especially by women — and options for treatment were scarce. Ford served as chair of the board of directors and was frequently seen at the center.

Derry Noyes, an art director for USPS, designed the stamp using a detail from the official 1977 White House portrait by Felix de Cossio. The oil-on-canvas portrait, which is part of the White House collection, courtesy of The White House Historical Association, shows Mrs. Ford seated, wearing a pale blue chiffon dress. “Betty Ford” is written in white across the bottom of the stamp, with the word “Forever” positioned at the upper-left side.

The Betty Ford stamp is being issued in panes of 20 and is a Forever stamp, meaning it will always be equal in value to the current First-Class Mail 1-ounce price. News of the stamp is being shared with the hashtag **#BettyFordStamp**.

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