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Detroit
MARCH 23, 1975

Ford's pal Pete Secchia (who?): an unknown quantity from Grand Rapids

by ALEX TAYLOR

The closest friends and advisers of President Gerald Ford were gathered in the Ford family home in Alexandria following the new President's first speech to a joint session of Congress. It was a scant three days after Ford ascended to the White House in the whirlwind of events that swept Richard Nixon from office. With the President now were the men who would be closest to him in the early days of the Ford administration: Alexander Haig, Philip Buchen, William Seidman, Bryce Harlow, Melvin Laird, William Whyte of U.S. Steel, and Peter Secchia. (SAY-kya)

Peter who?

Last September, in the first 30 days, of his Administration, Ford was basking in widespread approval for his openness and candor, and seemed to be rebuilding confidence in the government. Then he decided to pardon Richard Nixon. At a speaking engagement in Pittsburgh hours later, Gerald Ford heard himself booed for the first time as President of the United States. Back in the White House, he had dinner with his wife, daughter and Peter Secchia.

Peter who?

Days passed, and the political crisis of the Nixon pardon lessened, only to be replaced by a personal crisis: Betty Ford is suddenly taken to the hospital and undergoes an operation for breast cancer. While in the hospital, she will have dinner with only one person outside the immediate family. He is Peter Secchia.

In February, Michael Ford, the President's eldest son and his wife Gayle made a surprise visit to Michigan's Boyne Highlands ski area. When the news was leaked to the press, the man who organized the trip moved the dinner to another restaurant and moved the young couple back to his Grand Rapids home the next day. That man was Peter Secchia.

Who is this Secchia guy, anyway?

In Washington, the President is advised by some holdovers from the Nixon administration, his own advisers from his congressional and vice presidential days, and a group of men, variously known as the "Michigan Mafia" or "The Michigan Gang". They are

SECCHIA



Peter Secchia, the 37-year-old president of United Forest, a close friend of the First Family. Some say he bears a close resemblance to Bebe Rebozo. Both are first generation rich, and both of their respective presidents late in their careers. But there is one major difference.

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