

Abplanalp's High-Level Friends Aiding His Ventures?

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WASHINGTON — Robert H. Abplanalp, who has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on President Nixon, has been quietly expanding his closely held business empire.

Friends and business associates insist that Abplanalp has received no special help from the government and that he has given more to the President, out of friendship, than he has received.

Nevertheless, Abplanalp and the White House have lowered a curtain of secrecy on real estate deals in Florida and California which seem to have benefited both Abplanalp and the President.

And there is evidence that Abplanalp's high-level friendship has helped him and his partners in recent ventures.

On May 29, Abplanalp's firm, the Precision Valve Corp., which is acquiring a small airline, was awarded — for \$55,000 a year — the exclusive lease to operate the \$10 million Sullivan County International Airport, near his resort and real estate holdings in upper New York.

THE FEDERAL Aviation Agency, which paid about half the cost of the airport, quickly approved the agreement. And business sources in the area said Abplanalp expects Civil Aeronautics Board approval for regular passenger service, via his airline or others, to the airport.

On the evening of May 8, Abplanalp tried to bring a group of 50 businessmen to the area in a chartered jetliner to have dinner at his Eldred (game) Preserve restaurant and to show off the region. The plane couldn't land because of bad weather and was forced to turn back to New York City.

On May 11, Abplanalp told The Middletown (N.Y.) Times Herald Record that he would not take over the airport unless its runway had an instrument landing system for use in bad weather.

On May 14, the Sullivan County Board of Supervisors announced that the FAA, on May 8, had granted the airport \$80,000 for the installation of a \$141,000 instrument landing system.

The grant was approved in spite of a CAB ruling two years before that the airport, as it was then operated, did

not justify further investment of regularly scheduled airline service.

Thus the board of supervisors, under fire for spending more than \$400,000 a year to pay for bonds and maintenance, approved the lease with Abplanalp in the hope he would develop the airport and bring jobs and tourists to the area.

SULLIVAN COUNTY businessmen and residents said that while Abplanalp's wealth and business success were the public reasons for approving the low-rent lease, it was presumed that his friendship with the President also would help.

Similarly, when a Yonkers, N.Y. businessman, George J. Pacchiana, wanted to organize an independent bank in his area and obtain a federal charter, he went to Abplanalp and his lawyer, William E. Griffin, for help.

During the government's routine investigation of the bank's organizers, a Treasury Department official quoted Griffin as saying: "Through his (Griffin's) business, personal, and political contacts, he estimates that he can bring \$3 million in deposits into the bank."

Griffin was an assistant to New York's lieutenant governor 10 years ago and was later a member of the Westchester County Board of Supervisors, but has been out of active politics locally for several years.

WHEN THE charter was granted, in December 1971, by the U.S. Comptroller of the Currency, and the Hudson Valley National Bank opened for business in May 1972, its biggest new accounts included Yonkers Raceway and Precision Valve, which has its headquarters in Yonkers.

Abplanalp, his father and other officers of Precision Valve, including Griffin, the company's secretary, held more stock — 27,800 shares with an original value of \$278,000 — than any other group. And Precision Valve's vice president and treasurer, Angelo P. Ferrera, joined Griffin on its board of directors.

Other stockholders include Pacchiana, whose realty company is renting a building (at from \$50,000 to \$85,000 a year) to the bank; Walter J. Higgins, whose Olympic Parking Services Inc. has the parking concession at



Associates of Robert H. Abplanalp, President Nixon's quiet friend and confidant, say he has received no special government help in his business ventures. But there is some evidence that his connections didn't hurt at all when he started a bank and took over an airport.

most major New York race tracks; and Charles E. Lucey, the bank's Washington lawyer during negotiations with the government.

Lucey, who declined to answer telephone messages from reporters, and two other men in his office who hold shares of the bank's stock, are in the same firm as Murray Chotiner, a longtime Nixon associate who has acknowledged using his influence at the White House for other clients.

Attorney Bought 2 Lots on Key

GRIFFIN, in December 1972, purchased from President Nixon two pieces of land at Key Biscayne, about a mile from the Florida White House. Nixon paid \$53,000 for the lots several years ago; Griffin paid Nixon \$150,000.

Griffin has refused interviews and telephone calls but has insisted to friends he bought the lots for himself "for speculation." However, his financial statement filed with the Comptroller of the Currency shows he sold stock and borrowed heavily to pay for his bank shares.

An attorney in Yonkers who knows Griffin said that Griffin, as Abplanalp's personal attorney, made the purchase for Abplanalp.

It would not have been the first time that Abplanalp paid a healthy sum on behalf of the President.

IN 1968 Abplanalp gave at least \$18,500 to Nixon's presidential campaign, and he acknowledges making handsome contributions last year, but won't reveal the amounts, which remain hidden by the Finance Committee to Reelect the Presi-

In 1969, Abplanalp and his wife, Josephine, bought out one of the President's neighbors at Key Biscayne for \$150,000, and leased the house to the Secret Service for \$18,000 a year.

A spokesman for Abplanalp said the Yonkers industrialist also has spent "perhaps \$100,000" providing living, recreation, and working facilities for the President and his party when they come to visit the Abplanalp's hilltop estate on Grand Cay in the Bahamas.

But the most publicized act of Abplanalp's largesse came in 1969 and 1970 when he loaned the President about \$1 million for the purchase of the home at San Clemente.

Abplanalp, according to the White House, later canceled or otherwise took over most of the notes, and formed an investment company, to hold most of the property surrounding the President's home.

THE UPSHOT of the complicated deal is that the President put out only \$34,514 in cash for his home and 5.9 acres of beachfront land, which, with government-paid improvements, is now worth more than \$500,000. And Abplanalp's investment company, for \$1.2 million, is said to have title to the rest

of the San Clemente estate.

But the deed still has not been filed. The name, full ownership and purpose of the investment company have been kept secret by the White House and Abplanalp.

The intended future use of the land is not clear.

It's possible it could revert to the Nixon family's ownership or use when he leaves office. The White House has said "it was thought that at some future date the Richard Nixon Foundation might be a compatible buyer of the property if it met the needs of the foundation as a possible site for a presidential library."

But the Watergate affair has all but paralyzed the activities of the foundation's board, which has stopped seeking contributions for the library.

FOR ALL his generosity toward the President, and although his business interests are expanding steadily, Abplanalp apparently has not profited from government as others have in the Nixon circle of close friends.

For example, a firm belonging to Charles C. (Bebe) Rebozo has received healthy contracts for title fees from the Department of the Interior. And Donald Kendall, the head of PepsiCo, got the right to soft drink markets in the

Soviet Union. Precision Valve sells to companies which serve the government, but has no federal contracts itself.

Vincent Carberry, Abplanalp's public relations man, says of his boss: "He's done an awful lot for the President, but he has asked nothing in return."

In fact, Carberry, ever the PR man, is somewhat miffed that in all the times the President has visited Grand Cay, Nixon has not offered and Abplanalp hasn't asked him to journey to Walker's Cay to give it some publicity.

Stories of Deal Stir His Anger

WALKER'S CAY is another group of Bahamas islands owned by Abplanalp. He has been trying to develop it as a tropical fish laboratory and the Caribbean center for big-game fishing for the big rich.

Although the President has cruised the islands on Abplanalp's 55-foot yacht, Sea Lion II, Carberry said, "He (Abplanalp) just won't get Nixon to Walker's Cay. He bends over backward to avoid publicity which takes advantage of his friendship with the President."

A BIG, gruff, and husky 50-year-old, Abplanalp has been boiling with anger over stories about the San Clemente land deal and his involvement with the bank. But he has refused to see reporters, although his associates keep promising interviews.

Virtually all his business interests are wholly owned and therefore not part of public records. And, as Carberry says: "This makes it difficult for reporters. But Abplanalp (who has resisted selling stock in his companies) wouldn't be able to do the things he has been able to do if he went public and had to answer to a board of directors."

Although he operates very privately in the corporate world, he has fit in with the President's network of corporate friends.

He Overcame Fear of Flying

IN 1949, Abplanalp, a machinist like his father, Hans, joined forces with a chemist who had the idea, and a businessman who had the money. Together they produced the most workable, inexpensive, disposable valve for aerosol sprays.

Abplanalp subsequently bought out his two partners in Precision Valve. And today it has \$60 million in American sales, manufactures valves in Japan, Germany, France, Argentina, Mexico, Canada, South Africa, Italy, Brazil and Australia — and Abplanalp is worth about \$100 million.

Besides Walker's Cay and Eldred Preserve, which includes the restaurant and a motel, Precision Valve owns a plastics factory, is taking over Hudson Valley Airways in New York, and owns a fleet of planes under the subsidiary, Precision Airways.

Oddly, Abplanalp was afraid of flying for years. He took trains to Florida, boats to the Bahamas, and ships on European business trips.

But because of the President's quick, frequent trips South, Abplanalp compromised by flying in a seaplane. As his fear of flying was slowly overcome, his company acquired jets. And now, with the agreement to run the Sullivan County Airport, Abplanalp has obtained the American distributorship for a German-built airplane — the Hansa Jet — and seems headed into the airlines business.

ALTHOUGH Abplanalp backed Nixon in his 1960 campaign against John Ken-

nedy, the two men didn't meet until 1963 in New York. As the story goes, Abplanalp, ordinarily shy, introduced himself to Nixon and said, of the 1960 race: "You were robbed."

Nixon, still seething from his 1962 gubernatorial defeat in California, took instantly to Robert Abplanalp. They exchanged visits in Yonkers, where they lunched in an Italian restaurant; in Bronxville, where Abplanalp lives modestly; on Park Avenue, where the Nixons lived while Nixon practiced law, and in the Bahamas.

Abplanalp's wife, the former Josephine Sloboda, hit it off with Pat Nixon. And Abplanalp's two children, John, 15, and Marie, 13, became friends with Julie and Tricia.

Helen Bell Rogers, who runs the Yonkers Chamber of Commerce, recalls that when Precision Valve was given an award for service to the community and Abplanalp was called on for a speech, he simply said: "You really don't want to hear a speech, so thank you very much."

"ABPLANALP is a very quiet man, and a loner, like the President. This makes him a good listener for a man who wants to talk, or a good companion for a man who wants to be isolated. Mr. Nixon knows that when he tells Bob Abplanalp something, it won't end up with Jack Anderson."

Along with his friendship with the President, Abplanalp's name itself has become an object of curiosity. His name, of Swiss-German origin, means "from flat mountain." His friends call him "Alpy." And Harvard's resident economist and wit, John Kenneth Galbraith notes Abplanalp's name is a partial palindrome (a word which is spelled the same forward and backward).

"One might say Abplanalp is an example of palindromus interruptus," said Galbraith.

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