



## William Clay Ford

William Clay Ford spent 57 years as an employee and board member of Ford Motor Company, helping steer the company into the modern era while also serving as a guiding hand for the Ford family.

Mr. Ford, who died on Sun., March 9, 2014 at the age of 88, linked Ford Motor Company's past and future as the last surviving grandchild of company founder Henry Ford and the father of current Executive Chairman William Clay Ford, Jr.

Mr. Ford held key posts on Ford's board of directors and played a pivotal role in shaping the company for more than half of its 110-year history. He also was instrumental in setting the company's design direction and served as chairman of the Design Committee for 32 years. He led the team that developed the 1956 Continental Mark II, regarded as one of the classic automobiles of all time.

Born in Detroit on March 14, 1925, William Clay Ford was the youngest son of Mr. & Mrs. Edsel B. Ford's four children. He attended Detroit University School in Grosse Pointe, Mich., and the Hotchkiss School in Lakeville, Conn. Mr. Ford enlisted in the Naval Air Corps in 1943 and attended the University of Michigan as part of his naval training. He was in flight training at the time of his discharge two years later. He then enrolled at Yale University, where he graduated in 1949 with a bachelor of science degree in economics.

Mr. Ford was elected to the company's board of directors on June 4, 1948, embarking on a career and association with the company that would span more than six decades, including the company's celebration of its centennial in 2003. At the annual meeting that year, he shared his unique perspective on the company's history with shareholders, including stories about being taught to drive by Henry Ford and taken for his first airplane ride by Charles Lindbergh in a Ford Tri-Motor.

It was a rare moment of public reflection for Mr. Ford, who once characterized his key contributions to the company as helping the Design department and providing a stabilizing influence on the company's board of directors. He was also immensely proud of the Ford family's role in building and sustaining the company.

"I don't have a crystal ball with me, so I can't see into the future," he told shareholders at the company's centennial annual meeting. "I just want you to know that we have tremendous pride in the Ford name. We have a spirit of working together, and we have a passion for cars. And we also have a great desire to see the Ford name in the forefront of world transportation."

Mr. Ford had a special relationship with his grandfather. When he was 10 years old, Henry Ford gave him a driving lesson. The youngster sat on his famous grandfather's lap, steering the car and controlling the speed by throttle while Henry Ford took care of braking and shifting gears. Unfortunately, while driving 70 mph down a rural road outside of Dearborn, Mich., the two were stopped by a police officer. The officer let the elder Ford off with a lecture. Then, unbeknownst to Henry Ford, the officer phoned his wife, Clara Ford, who was waiting for her husband and grandson when they arrived back home.

“Her first words were, ‘Billy, you go to your room, and Henry -- I want to talk to you,’ Mr. Ford said. “After that, any time we left the property, I was in the passenger seat.”

Another time, a young Mr. Ford was confined to his bedroom with an illness while the extended family celebrated Christmas. When it came time for the meal, Henry Ford was nowhere to be found. He was discovered upstairs with his grandson, who had rigged up a special pulley system with a nearby tree so he could shoot paper targets from his bedroom window.

“He thought that was great,” Mr. Ford told The Henry Ford Museum during an interview in 2001. “He came up and joined me. He was up there for about an hour.”

Mr. Ford enrolled at Yale University in 1945. At Yale, he captained the varsity soccer and tennis teams, earning seven varsity letters. After graduating from Yale, he joined the company’s Sales and Advertising Staff in 1949. He later served on the Industrial Relations Staff, where he was a member of the committee that negotiated the company’s 1949 contract with the then UAW-CIO. In 1951, Mr. Ford became quality control manager for the Lincoln-Mercury Division’s jet engine defense project.

On July 17, 1952, Mr. Ford was appointed manager of Special Product Operations in charge of a group of engineers and designers engaged in advanced planning of the Continental Mark II, successor to the classic Lincoln Continental developed under the direction of his father, Edsel Ford, and introduced in 1939. The Continental Mark II was considered by many to be one of the greatest cars ever built.

Mr. Ford told the Henry Ford Museum that he wanted to closely follow the designs of the original Continental. That included matching the ratio of window glass to sheet metal, recreating the intimate feel of the interior controls, as well as mounting the spare tire within an impression in the sheet metal of the trunk, recalling the original Continental’s outside-mounted spare tire.

“I wanted the spare tire in the back. That was the trademark of a Continental,” he said. “We took most of the basic proportions of that car and tried to keep those same proportions in the Mark II, and I think we did pretty well at it.”

Mr. Ford’s election as a vice president was announced May 12, 1953. He was vice president and general manager of the Continental Division from 1954 to 1956, when Continental operations were consolidated with the Lincoln Division. In 1956, Mr. Ford assumed responsibility for corporate product planning and design.

When the Design Committee of the company’s Policy and Strategy Committee was formed in 1957, Mr. Ford became its first chairman, a post he held until he retired from the company in 1989. Mr. Ford was appointed vice president - Product Design in 1973.

In 1978, Mr. Ford was elected chairman of the Executive Committee and appointed a member of the Office of the Chief Executive. He was elected vice chairman of the Board in 1980 and chairman of the Finance Committee in 1987. He retired from his post as vice chairman in 1989 and as chairman of the Finance Committee in 1995. In May 2005, Mr. Ford retired as a director of Ford and was named Director Emeritus.

Mr. Ford received an honorary doctor of science degree from the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, Calif., in 1981.

An avid golfer, he competed in numerous tournaments and made seven hole-in-ones in his career. He also drove the Indianapolis 500 pace car in three separate races.

Mr. Ford had numerous associations and roles outside of Ford Motor Company. His relationship with the Detroit Lions began during his childhood when his father, Edsel Ford, took him to the University of Detroit Stadium to see the first Lions' team play in their maiden season in the Motor City in 1934. In November 1963, Mr. Ford purchased the team and served as its chairman until his death.

In 2002, Mr. Ford brought the Lions back to Detroit when the team moved into Ford Field, a new stadium located in the heart of the city's sports and entertainment district. The \$500 million stadium became the overwhelming factor in Detroit being awarded the right to host Super Bowl XL in February 2006. The championship game provided a \$260 million boost to metro Detroit and served as a symbol of the Ford family's dedication to supporting the city.

In May 2003, The Detroit News honored Mr. Ford as a Michiganiaan of the Year for 2003, an annual tribute to select citizens who made significant contributions to the state or local community. In September 2005, he was inducted into the Michigan Sports Hall of Fame.

Mr. Ford was chairman of the board of trustees of the Henry Ford Museum from 1951 to 1983, after which he was named chairman emeritus. He served as a director of the Detroit Economic Club, was an honorary life trustee of the Eisenhower Medical Center and a national trustee for the Boys' and Girls' Clubs of America. He also was an honorary chair of the United Way for Southeastern Michigan and served on the Texas Heart Institute National Advisory Council.

A generous philanthropist, in recognition of his support Henry Ford Hospital named their sports medicine treatment and research facility The William Clay Ford Center for Athletic Medicine, and the University of Michigan named their outdoor tennis courts in his honor. The largest donor in history at the Henry Ford Museum, the Great Hall of the museum – The William Clay Ford Hall of American Innovation – also was named in his honor.

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