

President takes spill in front of President

How would you feel if you knew the President of the United States was watching you ski? Would you show off or get nervous?

Dr. Gordon C. Blank, president of Western Piedmont Community College, tells what he did when he had an unexpected encounter with President Gerald R. Ford on the ski slopes of Vail, Colo. over Christmas.

"I let my confidence get ahead of my ability and I took a bad spill right in front of the President," Dr. Blank says.

He and his family had gone on a skiing vacation during the Christmas holidays to the Dillon, Colo. area. But on Christmas Day they decided they must go over to Vail because they had heard so much about it. That happened to be the day when the President was skiing there.

"I had heard the President was skiing there but that they had a private slope reserved for him, so I didn't really expect to catch sight of him," Dr. Blank says. What he didn't know, he adds, was that after the President finished skiing on the private slope he would sometimes cut over and ski on a public slope surrounded by Secret Service men.

"I happened to be skiing down the slope and noticed the President and his party were resting on that same slope," Dr. Blank explains. "One of the Secret Service men told me I could go on ahead and ski down if I kept to the far side of the slope."

"I noticed the President was just standing there and had nothing else to watch but me so I put on my best exhibition and skill, knowing he was looking," the WPCC president says. "In the process I let my confidence get ahead of my ability and I took a bad spill right in front of the President. I noticed he was grinning from ear to ear as I was getting up."

Dr. Blank picked himself up, went down the slope a little further and rested. In a short while the President and his party came within 10 to 15 feet of the local man and the President recognized him as the one who had taken the spill.

He said to Dr. Blank, "Hello, how are you today?" Dr. Blank said "Fine, Mr. President."

And that was the end of the never-to-be-forgotten unplanned meeting between Gordon C. Blank of Morganton, North Carolina, and Gerald R. Ford of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington, D. C.

Dr. Blank, who observed President Ford skiing, said he was a good recreational skier. As he came down the slopes, the Secret Service men were in a V-formation flanking him.

"He looked in top notch shape physically," Dr. Blank says. "And he was able to handle himself well on skis."