

Former First Lady Betty Ford Dies at 93

✖ Betty Ford, the former First Lady who overcame drug and alcohol addiction and has helped many others find victory, passed away on Friday. The widow of the late President Gerald Ford was 93.

After completing her own treatment for chemical dependency at the U.S. Naval Hospital in Long Beach, Calif., Ford talked to her friends about the need for a treatment center that emphasized the special needs of women, the Betty Ford Center website explains.

Ambassador Leonard Firestone encouraged her to pursue this dream. In 1982, they co-founded the non-profit Betty Ford Center in Rancho Mirage, Calif.

In a statement on Friday, President Barack Obama said the Betty Ford Center would honor Mrs. Ford's legacy "by giving countless Americans a new lease on life."

"As our nation's First Lady, she was a powerful advocate for women's health and women's rights," Obama said. "After leaving the White House, Mrs. Ford helped reduce the social stigma surrounding addiction and inspired thousands to seek much-needed treatment."

During her tenure as First Lady, Ford addressed public issues that were important to her. She was an outspoken advocate of women's rights and aspirations in an era when there was much debate on the matter, encouraged the appointment of more women to senior government posts, supported the U.N. International Women's Year in 1975, and supported passage of the Equal Rights Amendment, according to the Ford Library Museum.

"She was a wonderful wife and mother; a great friend; and a

courageous First Lady,” former President George H.W. Bush said in a statement on Friday. “No one confronted life’s struggles with more fortitude or honesty, and as a result, we all learned from the challenges she faced.”