



## Mike Grebe's Conservative Cudahy Condo

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The Cudahy, built in 1908, is one of the few buildings in the nation — and the only one in Milwaukee — that has been a prime residential address for over a century. Its adjoining 14-story Cudahy Tower (not “Towers”), built as an apartment hotel, has likewise had a stellar tenant roster and near total occupancy since it was added in 1929

Since its construction, the Cudahy, designed by Ferry and Clas, has endured two world wars, a depression and suburban flight with no diminution of the building's prestige. In 1988 then-owner Michael Cudahy emptied the apartments of their tenants, added a penthouse floor, and turned the building into deluxe condominiums, asking as much as \$125,000 for city-facing units, and triple for those facing the lake — record prices at the time. [Cudahy retains ownership of the Tower, which remains a first-class rental property.]

The Cudahy, with its peerless views of the lakefront and proximity to downtown, has drawn a number of prominent Milwaukeeans as residents. Some have treated it as a sort of way station to spend a decade or so between their suburban mansions and the nursing homes further up N. Prospect Ave. to which they eventually retire. It has long been a resort for widows, and to this day, most of its 43 units are owned by women including Barbara Kohl, Barb Stein and Betty Quadracci.

Michael W. Grebe, our House Confidential Honoree this week, comes to the Cudahy via the Village of River Hills, where he resided for many years on N. Range Line Road while chairman of Foley and Lardner, Milwaukee's oldest and largest law firm.

In retirement, Grebe secured a new gig as President and Chief Executive Officer of the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, located just up the street in The Lion House, 1241 N. Franklin Pl. The Foundation, with 2012 assets of \$615 million, made \$31 million in grants that year, including about \$7 million to support civic and cultural programs in its hometown.

Much of the rest of its grants went to conservative organizations, like the Heritage Foundation, the Ethics and Public Policy Center, the Cato Institute, the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), the National Tax Limitation Foundation and other groups. It recently funded a report critical of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, entitled “DPI's War on Wisconsin's School Choice Program.”

Grebe recently deflected criticisms that the foundation funds anti-Islamic programs, saying the group also has supported moderate-Islamic organizations.

Grebe is well-paid by the foundation, earning about \$232,000 last year, down from 2003, when he made \$529,000 there. Still, not a bad piece of change, especially on top of the Foley and Lardner retirement pay, and plenty enough to afford the 4th floor middle tier unit in the Cudahy, which is assessed at \$72,200 for the land and \$529,200 for the improvements for a total of \$601,400. Taxes on the unit, one of 43 in the Cudahy, are \$17,821.78, and are paid in full.

Mr. Patrick Cudahy took out a permit to build this white terra cotta-faced building of 1,181,400 cubic feet on December 20th, 1908. Its address then was 254 Mason St. It was also formerly known as 469 S. Prospect Ave, 920 E. Mason St., 773 N. Prospect Ave. and 783 N. Prospect Ave. before settling down to 777 N. Prospect Ave., as it is known today.

The 1929 tower addition, Milwaukee's first residential high-rise, was built on land bought from the Munkwitz Co. in 1924 by the Patrick Cudahy Family Co., and is 231 feet tall to the top of its pointy roof. It was designed by Holabird and Root of Chicago. Both structures are skeleton reinforced concrete, with concrete slab floors and joists, one reason they have been able to remain in such good shape. The Tower had 120 apartments in 1968, and probably a bit fewer today, as many units have been combined. The Tower operated as a residential hotel, much on the order of the nearby Astor and Knickerbocker buildings, neither one of which ever quite approached the Cudahy in terms of status or eclat.

Eleanor Roosevelt, while first lady, stayed in the Cudahy Tower when she came to town in 1936 to dedicate the Village of Greendale. The next year the Board of Appeals ruled that the "Swedish Institute of Massage," proposed to open there, was acceptable. "Occupancy of Massage is to be classed under sanatorium and to be permitted in a residence district." The tower is also the home to Bacchus Restaurant, one of many food establishments located there over the years, including the Boulevard Inn, Monsoon Chinese Restaurant, the Colonial Room and the Fleur de Lis, owned by Paul "Frenchy" LaPorte.

In 1959 Frenchy unexpectedly locked the doors to the restaurant and moved out, saying the rent was too high. This did not deter Michael Cudahy from relocating a planned cocktail party from the restaurant to the lobby of his apartment building, which he still owns.

#### The Rundown:

- Style: Beaux Arts Apartment Building
- Location: City of Milwaukee
- Neighborhood: Juneau Town, Milwaukee's 3rd most walkable neighborhood
- Commute: Grebe can make it to his office at the Lion house, .65 miles away, on foot in 12 minutes, but he can drive there in 5, or hop on the bus right across the street.
- Walk Score: 85 out of 100. "Very Walkable" Probably more walkable than the score indicates. [The Cudahy Tower scores an 89 out of 100.]
- Street Smart Walk Score: 93 out of 100 "Walker's Paradise."
- Transit Score: 56 out of 100. "Good Transit"

- Size: 2,501 square feet, plus a parking spot in the garage.
- Year Built: 1908
- Assessed Value: Land — \$72,200; Improvements — \$529,200 Total \$601,400
- Taxes: \$17,821.78 Paid In Full

#### About Michael Grebe:

Michael Grebe served for decades as a lawyer with Foley & Lardner, beginning in 1970, becoming a partner in 1977 and rising to become its CEO, a position he held from 1994-2002. Meanwhile, he was heavily involved in Republican politics, both in Wisconsin and nationally. He served as a general counsel to the Republican National Committee and was the Republican National Committeeman for Wisconsin from 1984 to 2002. He was a delegate to Republican National Conventions from 1984 to 2000.

Grebe served as campaign chair for Wisconsin's former Republican U.S. Senator Bob Kasten. In the early 1980s, Grebe seriously considered running for governor, but eventually decided against it.

His style as Bradley's CEO has been very different than that of his predecessor, the late Michael Joyce. Joyce loved to do battle with liberals and wrote op eds and made outspoken comments criticizing liberals and liberal ideas. He was much criticized for using Bradley money to help fund "The Bell Curve," the book co-authored by Charles Murray, which argued that there were racial differences in intelligence. Grebe seems to have taken a deliberately low-key approach while quietly funding ever more organizations to help move the nation — and Wisconsin — to the right.

Some observers have suggested Grebe has been instrumental in helping to engineer the conservative revolution overseen by Gov. Scott Walker. Grebe served as chair of Walker's 2010 campaign for governor and has provided funds for groups like ALEC, which helped write model bills for conservative legislation adopted by the state's GOP-controlled legislature. Grebe and Bradley have also funded a host of new right-wing publications that can be depended on to support Walker, as Urban Milwaukee editor Bruce Murphy has written. And the Bradley Foundation provides funding to the Americans for Prosperity, which provides support for the Tea Party, which has had a major influence nationally and in Wisconsin.

As "Fairly Conservative" blogger Cindy Kilkenny has put it: "To be Republican in Wisconsin means you are a Michael W. Grebe Republican. To a growing extent, to be a Republican in American means you are a Michael W. Grebe Republican."