

100th Anniversary of Reagan's Birth: Local Assemblyman is Ready to Celebrate

Jay Webber of Morris Plains continues his tradition of hosting parties on the late president's birthday.

By Carrie Stetler | January 22, 2011

When Assemblyman Jay Webber (R-Morris Plains) threw his first Jersey birthday party for Ronald Reagan in 2004, the celebration was held at the Lake Hiawatha fire house, and about 40 people showed up.

Reagan, who was still alive at the time, wasn't one of them.

"We had a sheet cake and some punch and that was it," said Webber, who calls the event NJ Reagan Day.



But on Feb 4, Webber expects more than 500 guests to attend a party in honor of Reagan's centennial at the [Sheraton Parsippany Hotel](#), with Reagan's son, Michael, as the keynote speaker.

Webber is a former New Jersey Republican Committee chairman, who backs legislation to designate Route 15 as the "Ronald Reagan Memorial Highway." Michael Reagan, a former conservative radio talk show host, is feuding with his brother, Ron, who recently published a book contending that Reagan's Alzheimer's symptoms began in office.

Michael, who was adopted by Reagan and his first wife, Jane Wyman, angrily denies that's the case. He has his own book out. "The New Reagan Revolution: How Ronald Reagan's Principles Can Restore America's Greatness."

Webber first got the idea of a Reagan birthday party at Harvard Law School, where his fellow conservative students held an annual celebration. "When I came down here to New Jersey, I thought, 'no one is celebrating the president's legacy.'"

Since then, the idea has caught on. The 100th anniversary of Reagan's birth will be celebrated by Republican groups across the nation.

Webber's party has expanded with help from the Young America's Foundation, a well-known conservative non-profit that helped book Ed Meese, attorney general under Reagan, as keynote speaker at last year's NJ Reagan Day. The organization oversees the preservation of The Reagan Ranch in California.

Although the event is slated to be attended by state GOP politicians, Webber calls it "grass roots."

"It's just likeminded New Jerseyans who want to come together for an evening, who want to look back on a great presidency and look forward and try to address the challenges we face as a nation... They're committed to promoting his legacy."

Webber, who grew up in Clifton, was 8-years-old when Reagan was elected in 1980 and in high school when he left office. "He was a comforting figure and an inspirational figure. I felt like you could relate to him. He was kind of a grandfatherly figure. Someone you admired and you trusted."

Later, he began to appreciate what he sees as Reagan's accomplishments as president. "He reminded us of what it meant to be an American and gave us our country back. We had the longest and greatest expansion of the American economy during his leadership."