

N.M.'s First Gentleman Takes a Job

By Dan Boyd / Journal Staff Writer on Fri, Nov 9, 2012

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SANTA FE – First Gentleman Chuck Franco, who turned in his sheriff's badge when his wife was elected governor of New Mexico, has gone back to work.

Franco, former Doña County undersheriff and husband of Gov. Susana Martinez, started a new job last week as a security officer at the U.S. Courthouse in downtown Santa Fe, a spokesman for Martinez confirmed.

He is working roughly 20 to 25 hours a week for a private security company that is under contract with the U.S. Marshals Service to provide courthouse security.

"Chuck has the expertise for the position, and given some of the financial strains that come with he and the governor working to maintain two houses and care for their family, it's necessary for them to have two incomes," Martinez spokesman Scott Darnell said.

In addition to the Governor's Mansion in Santa Fe, Martinez and Franco also maintain a home in Las Cruces, where the governor's sister lives with a full-time caregiver.

Franco left his job as Doña Ana County undersheriff after Martinez was elected in 2010. His career previously included work as a police officer and game warden, among other jobs.

He has stayed largely in the background since his wife took office as the state's first elected female governor. However, Franco testified last year in front of a legislative committee on a bill dealing with mandatory DNA samples from individuals arrested for a felony.

Franco told the Journal last year that when not traveling back and forth between Las Cruces and Santa Fe, he has filled his time in the state's capital city with volunteer activities, yardwork at the Governor's Mansion and a rediscovered passion for painting and drawing.

And Martinez touted Franco's bologna sandwich-making skills in her first State of the State address as the reason she got rid of two mansion chefs.

As other New Mexico gubernatorial spouses did before him, Franco receives a largely symbolic salary – roughly \$2 a year – for being first gentleman. The governor's salary, set by law, is \$110,000 a year.

Franco, who deferred comment to the Governor's Office on the subject of his new job, underwent a Department of Justice background check as a requisite for the position. He is technically a special deputy U.S. marshal while on the job at the courthouse.

The job will not force Franco to suspend his state retirement benefits since it involves part-time hours for a private company, Darnell said.

Recent New Mexico first spouses have generally not held jobs but have taken on roles in a wide range of causes.

Barbara Richardson, the wife of former Democratic Gov. Bill Richardson, was active in the administration's anti-domestic violence efforts.

Meanwhile, Dee Johnson, the wife of Richardson's predecessor, Republican Gary Johnson, championed women's and children's issues and led the charge to ban smoking in the state Capitol, which was enacted in 2002.

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