

# Inventing Protocol for First Girlfriend

By [ERICA ORDEN](#)

As New York Gov.-elect Andrew Cuomo assembles his administration, one prominent post will remain officially vacant: first lady.

Mr. Cuomo is not a single man—his romantic partner of four years is the TV chef Sandra Lee. But since the two remain unmarried, Ms. Lee won't assume the title typically taken by the governor's wife. Now, Ms. Lee and Mr. Cuomo, the first unmarried governor since Hugh Carey took office in 1975, must determine what role a gubernatorial significant other will play.

In other words, if Ms. Lee won't be first lady, how will she function as first lady-friend?

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Associated Press

Gov.-elect Andrew Cuomo and his girlfriend, Sandra Lee.

Ms. Lee isn't expected to have any official duties, staff or title, said a person familiar with the matter. And Albany residents hoping for Ms. Lee to introduce her recipes such as "Having-It-All Caramel Shortbread" or "Cheesy Chorizo Chili" to the capital's culinary scene will find themselves disappointed: She has no plans to relocate to the executive mansion from her residence in Mount Kisco, where she and Mr. Cuomo live.

"She has many talents that could be of service to the State of New York and any contribution of her time or participation would be Sandra's pleasure and not at public expense," said Josh Vlasto, a Cuomo campaign spokesman. "Sandra would never expect any taxpayer dollar to support the contributions she makes nor would she want to burden the state in anyway. She will be supportive and generous to the people of the state and she will accommodate them in every and any way she can."

Still, a number details regarding Ms. Lee's integration with Mr. Cuomo's life as governor have yet to be sorted. It's not clear whether the State Police will provide Ms. Lee security detail typically assigned to first ladies. Former Gov. Eliot Spitzer's wife, Silda Wall Spitzer, was assigned two or three security personnel, including a driver, and oversaw a staff of three tax-payer-funded aides, according to people familiar with the matter.

Current first lady Michelle Paige Paterson has security detail and space in the governor's New York City office. State police are largely responsible for assessing Ms. Lee's need for security, according to a person familiar with the matter.

Also unsettled is the degree to which Ms. Lee will develop a profile in the traditional first-lady mold. Wives of governors past have often taken up charitable and civic causes and occasionally accompanied their husbands to public events. Their marital status did not shield them from scrutiny. Mr. Cuomo's father, Mario Cuomo, and George Pataki, two former governors, each endured criticism for allowing their wives and family members to travel on state aircraft.

While state ethics bodies have addressed issues regarding spouses, such as the usage of state aircraft, questions concerning romantic companions have rarely arisen. Under state law, lobbyists are prohibited from giving gifts to spouses of public officials; the law doesn't prevent them from buying presents for girlfriends or boyfriends.

Political observers say the fact that Ms. Lee and Mr. Cuomo aren't married won't detract from her ability to serve as his surrogate. Mayor Michael Bloomberg's handling of his relationship with his longtime companion, Diana L. Taylor, has helped set a precedent. "We have a divorced mayor with a girlfriend; there's nothing wrong with having a divorced governor with a girlfriend," said Mitchell Moss, professor of urban policy at New York University.

What could limit Ms. Lee's presence is her full-time, highly visible career hosting two TV shows, editing a magazine, and authoring a batch of recipe books. She made few appearances on the campaign trail, quipping that she was focused on being the "first lady of cookbooks right now." She posted a message on her blog reminding readers to vote and stood alongside Mr. Cuomo at his victory speech in Manhattan. Mr. Cuomo, while thanking his father and campaign aides, didn't mention her during his remarks.

A low-profile for Ms. Lee may, in fact, allow her to avoid repeating the missteps of New York's last gubernatorial girlfriend, Evangeline Gouletas, who dated Mr. Carey. Ms. Gouletas, prior to their marriage in 1981, was criticized for taking what some believed to be too active of a role with his administration. Ms. Gouletas said in email, "We had a very harmonious relationship with the staff."

They divorced in 1993, and Mr. Carey later described the marriage as a mistake.

