

Manuel J. Maldonado Write-In Candidate for Sheriff - meets with voters

By Frost McGahey

On Monday, July 11, Sheriff Frank Gomez and his deputy, Manny Maldonado met with voters at Arby's. Because Gomez lost the Democratic primary, Maldonado has decided to run as a write-in candidate for sheriff in the November general election.

When asked why he was taking on this difficult task, Maldonado replied, "I couldn't stand by and watch our department go backwards. If Raul Villanueva becomes sheriff, we are going to lose 10 of our 39 deputies because he was so bad. These deputies have already applied to work elsewhere because they don't want to work for Raul. They'll stay if I win."

Some have speculated that since Villanueva let his police license lapse and became a bank teller at Wells Fargo that he had no intention of running for sheriff again. His turnabout may have been brought about by Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham wanting to unseat Sheriff Gomez because he had Grant County declared a Second Amendment sanctuary county.

Maldonado continued, "I was going to run for sheriff after Frank's term was over because sheriffs have a two-term consecutive limit. Our department was so upset at the outcome of the primary that Frank suggested I run for sheriff now.

For Villanueva, it was always about himself, Maldonado said. He didn't want any deputies making more than he did. Frank has five deputies making a better salary than he does. When Raul would go to the county commissioners, he would only ask for raises for himself, not for his employees.

"I'm president of the police officers' union in Grant County.," Maldonado said. "When we tried to get a .50 an hour raise from Raul, he wouldn't do it. He said he'd give us a \$1.00 raise if two deputies got fired. Officers quit over that, and one was Villanueva's own cousin. By the time Raul's term was over, we were 11 deputies short.

"We'd also lose all the great programs that Frank has instituted in the last 4 years," he continued. "We now have Crisis Intervention Training to help both the officers and the public. A psychologist comes down once a month from Albuquerque, Dr. Rogers, to speak with us and help us with our concerns. Police officers especially nowadays are under tremendous pressure. He trains us on how to handle stress personally and how to defuse situations with the public."

Because of the drug problems in Grant County, Gomez had the department partner with the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas program. It's a federal task force with state and local agencies. "Our county has been determined to be one of the critical drug-trafficking regions of the United States. I'm afraid Raul wouldn't keep this program going. He had no drug task force and not even an officer who was trained in narcotics."

Officers are now being sent for training in Criminal Investigation, something that didn't happen under Villanueva. "We also have a Cross-County Compact with Luna, Hidalgo, Dona Anna counties and the Border Patrol. If a Border Patrol Agent in Rodeo needs help, we can go to his aid. Raul didn't want this. We also can send officers to the Gila Cliff Dwellings which we never did in the past. We've worked up there helping to recover missing persons."

"Our officers are now getting much more emotional support through the Crisis Intervention Program and a Peer Support Team with available help from a chaplain service," Maldonado said. "Those officers who

resuscitated the baby that ate the fentanyl and almost died, needed help. They had small children of their own and were horrified about what happened to that child. Fortunately, the baby survived because they gave it CPR and Narcan."

Maldonado concluded, "In November, please write-in my name at the bottom where it shows sheriff - Manuel J. Maldonado. I've checked with the Secretary of State and if a voter is close to my name, it will count as a vote for me. Under Raul Villanueva bad things will happen here. That's why I'm campaigning as a Write-In Candidate for sheriff. I love Grant County and don't want to see it harmed."