
Couple is mainstay of Republican politics in N.H.

By Shira Schoenberg

Globe Correspondent / September 1, 2011

AMHERST, N.H. - When Susan Duprey travels with Ann Romney, the wife of presidential candidate Mitt Romney, Duprey carries the Sharpie pens, hand sanitizer, sewing kit, and camera phone. When Duprey's husband, Steve Duprey, traveled with 2008 presidential nominee John McCain, he had the pirate bandannas and eye patches, tropical hats in Florida, and cheesehead hats in Wisconsin.

To Ann Romney, Susan Duprey has become a "close confidante" with a reputation as a problem solver, according to one top campaign aide. Traveling with McCain, Steve Duprey earned the title "morale officer" for the way he would joke around and hand out McCain-Palin hockey pucks or shot glasses - in addition to being a trusted adviser.

The Dupreys carry to an extreme the type of citizen involvement that New Hampshire presidential campaigns rely on. They emphatically deny any aspirations for higher office, though he ran unsuccessfully for Congress in 1992. Between them, the two have worked on more than 30 national and state Republican campaigns since the 1970s.

"For any campaign at a state or federal level, you would have both of them on a short list of activists you want helping," said Charlie Arlinghaus, who was executive director of the state Republican Party when Steve Duprey was chairman. "They're low maintenance and they do a lot of work."

Susan Duprey is the former president of the Devine Millimet law firm; her husband developed some of the biggest real estate projects in Concord, their hometown. Both have been indispensable aides and fund-raisers to some of the state's most powerful Republican politicians, including current New Hampshire congressmen and several former governors.

They have been married for 28 years, raised three sons, and often work on the same campaigns, but the Dupreys have built independent reputations.

Susan Duprey, 60, a land use lawyer, was board chairman at the Manchester Chamber of Commerce and Heritage United Way. She has worked on economic development and women's leadership. Steve Duprey, 58, has a strong presence in Concord, where he built hotels and office buildings. He started an annual race benefiting a Concord cancer care center and organizes a free annual Christmas dinner that serves hundreds.

Their most public difference came during the 2010 Senate race. He was finance chairman for Republican Kelly Ayotte, who won. She was treasurer for Ayotte's primary opponent, Ovide Lamontagne, a law firm colleague.

"It was pretty rough," Susan Duprey recalled. "I'd attack him. [I'd say,] 'Why were you doing this?' " Yet two weeks after the primary, she donated \$1,000 to Ayotte. Lamontagne said he and Steve Duprey continue to bond at hunting and fishing camps their families visit.

Friends say the couple has much in common: strong personalities, integrity, community involvement, a love of the arts (music for her, fine arts for him) and loyalty to family, friends, and candidates.

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"A quality they both have is the ability to talk freely without a filter, honestly and openly," said Michael Dennehy, a Concord lobbyist and national political director for McCain's 2008 campaign.

Their personalities complement each other. "Steve is energetic, can be bombastic, outspoken," Arlinghaus said. "Susan is very calm, very professional, and charming."

Steve Duprey grew up in North Conway. In college, he volunteered for California congressman Pete McCloskey's New Hampshire primary campaign against President Richard Nixon. At 19, he was elected to the New Hampshire Legislature and was the country's youngest state representative.

He attended Cornell Law School, then moved to Concord. Despite a cycle helping his friend, Democrat Hugh Gallen, who was elected governor in 1979, his fund-raising skills and myriad connections made him a mainstay on Republican campaigns. He chaired finance committees for Senator Judd Gregg, Representative Bill Zeff, and others. He was chairman of the New Hampshire Republican Party for nine years, stepping down briefly in 1996 when a real estate company he owned was fined for mortgage fraud. He was not charged.

Today, he is a Republican National Committee member, working to preserve New Hampshire's first-in-the-nation primary.

Susan Duprey, from upstate New York, moved to New Hampshire to clerk for a state Supreme Court judge after graduating from Northeastern Law School.

She became involved in politics early, influenced by her conservative father and politically active law partners. Her first presidential campaign was Texas Governor John Connally's in 1979. She later served on the steering or finance committees of McCain, President George W. Bush, and congressmen Charlie Bass and Frank Guinta.

"I'm not going to tell you I've led a balanced life," she said. "I tend to plunge myself into the thing I'm working on."

Her husband's most intense political involvement was when he joined McCain's 2008 traveling team. He became one of McCain's most trusted advisers, one of the first men McCain saw each morning and one of the last each evening. He slept at McCain's ranch. When a reporter dubbed the campaign a "pirate ship," Steve Duprey bought the press eye patches and bandannas. He keeps a framed tie McCain sent him - a tie McCain borrowed off Duprey's neck when the candidate spilled coffee on his own.

He said the experience left him inspired, with a "deeper love for the country."

His experience influenced his wife's decision to volunteer for her traveling role with Ann Romney.

"Even though it was a lot of work - there were days it was really a grind - he never lost his joy in being on the trail," she said.

Susan Duprey oversees Ann Romney's schedule, helps her with remarks, and makes sure she eats healthy food. At one campaign stop, in New Hampshire, Duprey drove Romney and carried her gifts. When a reporter asked Romney about the debt ceiling, Duprey, standing behind the reporter, shook her head "no." Romney declined to answer.

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