INDIVIDUAL FEATURE 11.1

Lupe Valdez, Sheriff, Dallas County, Texas

Lupe Valdez was elected the sheriff of Dallas County, Texas, in November 2004 and has served for more than a decade. In Dallas County, the sheriff is the only countywide law enforcement official. With a salary of more than $140,000 and over 1,300 deputies to manage, Valdez is a powerful law enforcement figure in one of the largest counties in Texas. She is bilingual and earned a graduate degree in criminology and criminal justice from the University of Texas at Arlington and an undergraduate degree in business from what is now Southern Nazarene University.

Valdez was the first woman ever elected as Dallas County Sheriff. In a state noted for Republican governors and presidents, Valdez is a Democrat—the first Democrat to be elected Dallas County Sheriff in twenty-five years. She is also Latina and grew up picking crops from Texas to Michigan. Valdez and her family often slept and ate in the car to save money and to avoid being turned away at hotels and restaurants. The family eventually settled in her mother's hometown of San Antonio, where Valdez recalls seeing a fellow student hit with a ruler for speaking Spanish in school. Valdez attended college in Oklahoma and later was a captain in the U.S. Army Reserves, serving as an officer in the military police and in army intelligence. She was an agent for the U.S. Customs service until she retired to run for sheriff.

Perhaps most notable in an election year in which same-sex marriage was a hot issue, Valdez is a lesbian. Valdez ran a campaign that emphasized integrity, which was quite effective after years of scandals had plagued the sheriff's office. Apparently, voters were more concerned with integrity than with Valdez being a lesbian. In response to charges that she would promote a "gay agenda," Valdez emphasizes that her job as sheriff provides no opportunity to influence legislation. Although she has always been open about her sexual orientation, Valdez notes that "it has nothing to do with being sheriff." It does, according to one author, say a lot "about the new politics of sexual orientation in Texas," in which voters viewed her sexual orientation as not being relevant.[74] In 2014, Valdez was honored as a Latina "living legend," recognizing her hard work and dedication to the community.

SOURCES: Blumenthal, R. (2004, November 10). "An Improbable Victor Becomes a Texas Sheriff." *New York Times*. Section A, Column 1, National Desk, p. 16; Olsson, K. (2005, January). "The Gay Non-Issue." *Texas Monthly*, p. 82; http://lupevaldez.com; Olvera, M. (2014). "Hispanic 100 to honor Dallas County Sheriff Lupe Valdez as a 'Living Legend'," http://www.dallasnews.com/news/columnists/mercedes-olivera/20141010-hispanic-100-to-honor-sheriff-lupe-valdez-as-living-legend.ece, accessed November 10, 2014.

INDIVIDUAL FEATURE 11.2

Pascal Lepine, President of Atypic Multimedia Marketing and the Chambre Du Commerce Gaie Du Québec

Pascal Lepine is president of the successful multimedia marketing firm Atypic and of the Chambre de Commerce Gaie Du Québec in Montreal. Atypical himself, Lepine, at 28, is viewed as a role model for young gays entering the workforce. When Lepine began work, he was dismayed to find no gay role models; now he is doing his part to ensure young gays do have gay role models in the workforce.

Lepine believes that networking is the key to running a successful business, and thus he and the Chambre de Commerce Gaie Du Québec have partnered with McGill University to help gay and lesbian students as they start their careers. Chamber members network with students as prospective employers; students network with members. McGill's director of career and placement students, Gregg Blachford, who is also gay, holds career workshops for gay and lesbian students. Blachford encourages students to be open about their sexual orientation, because being open helps them build supportive networks of other gays and lesbians. Being closeted takes work and erodes confidence out of fear of slipping up and being found out. Both Lepine and Blachford view being gay as an advantage and that being gay helps people be more positive toward diversity. "Sometimes, when you've been marginalized in society, you're more open to others who are marginal. You're open to diversity and seeing the negative effects of discrimination against others."