

Schaefer's 'first friend' assumes more visible role

By Karen Hosler
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ANNAPOLIS — She is not married to the governor, but she enjoys many of a first lady's perquisites, including daily state police chauffeur service round trip from Baltimore. She is not a public official, but she is directing \$1.2 million in changes to the governor's mansion — some of it taxpayers' money.

She has demonstrated skill at charming state legislators and bureaucrats, yet unusual speed at dispatching state workers who get in her way. Among the departed is a 13-year veteran of the elite executive protection corps, who is now assigned to the state police security detail at Baltimore-Washington International Airport.

The lady's name is Hilda Mae Snoops, Gov. William Donald Schaefer's longtime companion. She likes to call herself "first friend." After years as a relatively unnoticed figure in Mr. Schaefer's private life, Mrs. Snoops has emerged as one of the most visible members of his gubernatorial entourage.

As Maryland's official hostess, she's at the governor's side at ceremonial gatherings, travels with him



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HILDA MAE SNOOPS Maryland's official hostess

overseas, presides with unquestioned authority over the governor's mansion and serves as a goodwill ambassador to the General Assembly.

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Snoops steps out of the shadows in assuming role

SNOOPS, from 1A

"She has a different role to play than if she were actually first lady, but she has obviously made it into what she wants it to be," observed Thomas V. Mike Miller Jr., D-Prince George's, the state Senate president.

During the past two decades of Mr. Schaefer's career as City Council president, mayor and now governor, it was known that he had a "lady friend," as Mr. Schaefer himself would refer to her. Mrs. Snoops appeared on his arm occasionally at social functions. She was often his date for private dinners with friends. The two frequently slipped away on vacations together, usually to their adjoining trailers near Ocean City.

But the bachelor mayor had no need for an official hostess. And the divorced grandmother and former nurse had her own career as an official with the federal Health Care Financing Administration. Their relationship was intensely private. She still refuses to grant interviews.

Since Mr. Schaefer became governor last year, however, Mrs. Snoops has asserted herself as a formidable part of his public life. She achieved that largely by taking control of the \$2.4 million mansion formally known as Government House, overseeing its public and private functions on a full-time basis.

Mrs. Snoops' arrival at the mansion in March — two months after her retirement from the federal government — came as an abrupt surprise to the two veteran Schaefer aides she displaced, according to some individuals familiar with the situation.

Jody Albright, the governor's director of social and cultural affairs who was originally assigned to the hostess role, suddenly moved out of her mansion office to rented quarters two blocks away. She functions now mostly as liaison to the arts community.

Mrs. Snoops said through a



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William Donald Schaefer stands beside Hilda Mae Snoops outside the Towson Courthouse in 1986 as Melvin A. Steinberg announces that he will run for lieutenant governor on the Schaefer ticket.

time to leave.

He had served four governors and was within three years of retirement when he was transferred last July to security duties at BWI.

"I had to do what was best for me," Corporal Freedman explained. "They told me we could try to work out the differences, but I figured if I stayed she would make my life miserable."

Neither Mrs. Snoops nor state police officials would comment on the nature of the conflict. They said it was a confidential personnel matter.

Mrs. Snoops draws no salary for her mansion duties, but she apparently spends about as many hours in Annapolis as the governor, who also commutes most of the time from Baltimore. She turned down a \$50-an-hour consulting contract with

Mrs. Snoops said through a spokesman that the move was Mrs. Albright's idea. Mrs. Albright refused to discuss the matter. Legislative leaders complain of being caught in a continuing cross fire between the two women.

In a sharp break with precedent, Mrs. Snoops also assumed responsibility for day-to-day operations of the mansion, easing out Chuck Fawley, Mr. Schaefer's longtime driver who had the \$36,000 post of Government House manager.

After Mr. Fawley found a new job last fall with Secretary of State Winfield M. Kelly Jr., Mrs. Snoops had the manager post abolished and hired a secretary instead at about half the salary, according to state personnel records.

"Mrs. Snoops is a lot more closely involved in the running of the mansion than other first ladies," said Earl F. Seboda, the state secretary of general services who confers with her almost on a daily basis. He said she helped prepare the mansion's \$619,000 budget that his agency submitted to the General Assembly last week.

Cpl. Mark L. Freedman was one of the state police bodyguards who chauffeured Mrs. Snoops' round trip from Baltimore each day, accompanied her around Annapolis on mansion errands and drove her to official functions in one of two Lincoln limousines with gubernatorial license plates. He says he still does not know how he might have offended Mrs. Snoops, but when his supervisor relayed her complaints about him last July, Corporal Freedman said he knew it was

an-hour consulting contract with the state Health Services Cost Review Commission last spring, saying her schedule was too full, according to Louise Hayman, a gubernatorial spokeswoman.

Like other mansion hostesses, Mrs. Snoops has busied herself with devising an ambitious program of improvements to the 108-year-old building.

She recently lobbied legislators for help in obtaining an overall \$1.2 million for proposed repairs, renovations and redecorations.

A third of the work would be financed with public funds included in Mr. Schaefer's proposed budget for the coming year. Mrs. Snoops hopes to raise \$700,000 of the \$1.2 million from private contributions, as well as gifts of furniture, artwork and antique furnishings, through an intricate web of contributors. There will not be a requirement for public disclosure of the gifts, though major donors of the \$140,000 collected so far have been identified.

They include a number of businessmen and organizations that either do business with the state or are affected by state regulations.

Individual contributions to political campaigns are limited to \$1,000, but no such restrictions exist for contributions to the Government House funds.

For example, Associated Builders and Contractors donated a \$29,000 set of silverware, which an ABC spokesman said Mrs. Snoops insisted be engraved with Mr. Schaefer's name. The silverware is to be returned at the end of the governor's

e as official Md. hostess

term, so that the trade association can trade it in and use the money for another charitable purpose, according to Victor Cyran, the executive director.

Much of the mansion work to be done involves the family quarters on the second and third floors, which a House Appropriations subcommittee found during an inspection last year to have fallen into serious disrepair.

Mrs. Snoops blames the condition of these rooms on former Governor Harry R. Hughes and his wife, Patricia, according to individuals who have spoken to her on the subject. She has been highly critical of the former first couple in her meetings with legislators, according to Delegate Timothy F. Maloney, D-Prince George's, the appropriations subcommittee chairman.

Mrs. Snoops also is unhappy with the seven public rooms on which Mrs. Hughes spent \$1.8 million in private funds to decorate in authentic period styles and pieces to reflect Maryland life.

Changes in those rooms cannot be made without approval from Gov-

ernment House Trust, which is nominally governed by officials of the Maryland Historical Society. However, a bill to be offered by the Schaefer administration this session would give the governor and legislative leaders voting control of the trust.

Historical society curators who were involved in the mansion work sponsored by Mrs. Hughes privately have expressed outrage at the prospect of changes. They are particularly appalled at Mrs. Snoops' plan to completely dismantle the so-called Billy Baldwin room, which is decorated in the modern, 20th century style of the Baltimore-born interior designer. But the historical society itself is raising no public protest.

"We take the position that this is essentially a government decision," said J. Jefferson Miller II, the society director. He said he sympathized with Mrs. Snoops' desire to make the home more compatible with her tastes.

"I think she might have overreacted a bit, though," Mr. Miller added.