

About the Speaker: Elsa A. Murano

Dr. Elsa A. Murano, 23rd President, Texas A&M University

Dr. Elsa A. Murano was the 23rd President of Texas A&M University. Taking office on Jan. 3, 2008, at age 49, she was the first woman and first Hispanic-American to lead the oldest public institution of higher learning in Texas — now one of the largest teaching and research universities in the nation.

Dr. Murano worked her way up the academic ranks - teaching and research - and into administration from an unconventional beginning. At the age of 2, her family departed from Havana, Cuba, when Fidel Castro came into power. After living in several Latin American countries, she and her family settled in Miami when she was 14 years old. At that time, she only knew Spanish, a language in which she is still fluent, but quickly mastered English and launched an educational career that carried her through the doctoral ranks.

"Someday in the future, if I write a book, it will be called *Only in America*, because this great country has provided me so many opportunities, including the great honor of serving as President of Texas A&M University," she is often quoted as saying.

Her association with the university dates back to 1995, when she joined the Texas A&M faculty as an Associate Professor in the Department of Animal Science and Associate Director of the Center for Food Safety within the Institute for Food Science and Engineering. Dr. Murano was named Director of the Center in 1997 and served in that position until 2001. Also, she rose to the rank of Professor and was named holder of the Sadie Hatfield Professorship in Agriculture.

Dr. Murano interrupted her Texas A&M service in 2001 when President George W. Bush asked her to serve as Under Secretary for Food Safety for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, making her the highest-ranking food safety official in the U.S. government. In leading the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service, she was responsible for an agency with a budget of approximately \$1 billion and about 10,000 employees, with the mission of working to improve public health through the application of science in policy decisions.

She returned to Aggieland in January 2005 as Vice Chancellor and Dean of Agriculture and Life Sciences, joint positions in which she served until being appointed President of Texas A&M. As Vice Chancellor and former Director of Texas AgriLife Research (formerly the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station), she led a transformation of agricultural programs and four state agencies within The Texas A&M University System to the benefit of students, peers and the agricultural community represented in 254 counties across Texas.

While serving as Dean, the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences experienced significant growth in enrollment and enhancement of its teaching, research and service endeavors. In conjunction with her deanship, Dr. Murano chaired a blue-ribbon task force to study ways for enhancing the undergraduate experience at the University, which has ultimately become known as "The Murano Report."

A noted expert on food safety, Dr. Murano was principal investigator or co-principal investigator in research projects totaling more than \$8.7 million during her professorial career, initially at Iowa State University and continuing at Texas A&M. She has been widely published, as author or co-author of seven books, book chapters or monographs, and scores of scholarly papers, abstracts and related materials.

Her car is a 2004 Ford Thunderbird—maroon, of course!

Dr. Murano began her professorial career in 1990 as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Microbiology, Immunology and Preventative Medicine at Iowa State, the position she held prior to joining the Texas A&M faculty. She received a bachelor's degree in biological sciences from Florida International University, and earned both a master's degree in anaerobic microbiology and a doctorate in food science and technology from Virginia Tech.

She is married to Dr. Peter S. Murano, Associate Professor of Nutrition and Food Science and Director of Texas A&M's Institute for Obesity Research and Program Development.