

# Star-Telegram

## Santorum woos the wealthy in Westlake

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WESTLAKE -- Republican presidential hopeful Rick Santorum swept through North Texas on Thursday -- for the second time in two weeks -- energizing local voters and adding to his campaign war chest.

Santorum, who is competing with Mitt Romney for front-runner status in the GOP race, spoke to a group of supporters during a private fundraiser in the gated community of Vaquero, one of the most high-end neighborhoods in the country.

The appearance came just days before crucial primaries in Arizona and Michigan on Tuesday.

Campaign officials declined to say how much money was raised at the event -- which was to benefit The Red, White and Blue Fund, a pro-Santorum super political action committee -- but the cost to attend was \$2,500 per person.

"There is a lot of money in Texas for him," said Cal Jillson, a political science professor at Southern Methodist University. "They can give in unlimited amounts to these super PACs.

"He is seen as the socially conservative alternative to Mitt Romney," he said. "Even Texans who have already supported Newt Gingrich might throw some money at him."

Police cars were parked near the security-patrolled Westlake enclave as a steady stream of vehicles entered the neighborhood, home to residents such as conservative political commentator Glenn Beck, Texas Rangers outfielder Josh Hamilton, BNSF Railway CEO Matthew Rose and pro golfer Ben Crane. Yankees first baseman Mark Teixeira, formerly a Ranger, owns a home there that he is leasing out to New Orleans Saints coach Sean Payton.

Texas' primary isn't expected to take place until at least May 29, and court challenges or rulings may further delay it. Despite that, Santorum didn't wait long to return to Texas.

He was here earlier this month, talking to preachers and Tea Party activists and holding rallies. On Thursday, he also attended a private fundraiser at Royal Oaks Country Club in Dallas and did an interview with Beck.

Some political experts say they wouldn't be surprised to see Santorum back in Texas again soon.

"People come here to raise money because there's more people and more money here," said Jim Riddlesperger, a political science professor at Texas Christian University.

"He will keep coming back. And he might very well find a lot of traction in Texas. Especially since the situation is such that Texas might still very much be in play."

Super PACs, a new force in the presidential campaign, were created as a result of a Supreme Court ruling that opened the door to unlimited campaign contributions from corporations, unions, associations and others.

They can't give money directly to candidates or strategize with them or their campaigns. But candidates may help super PACs raise money and appear at fundraisers such as the one in Westlake.

Super PACs such as The Red, White and Blue Fund can spend unlimited money to advertise for or against political candidates.

So far, the main donor to the fund has been Wyoming investor Foster Friess, a businessman who supports conservative Christian causes and recently apologized for a joke that suggested aspirin was a method of contraception. Friess, a longtime friend of Santorum's, was expected to attend the event because he wanted to hear the candidate speak.

The super PAC had reported receiving nearly \$730,000 through the end of 2011, including \$250,000 from Friess.

Two Texans were listed as donors: Joe Murphy of Murphy Tomatoes in Shavano Park, northwest of San Antonio, contributed \$5,000, and Phil Marsteller of Colleyville contributed \$290, according to documents filed with the Federal Election Commission.

## Strong in Texas

A recent poll shows that Santorum's support among Texas Republicans is growing. Santorum drew 45 percent of the support, compared with Newt Gingrich's 18 percent, Mitt Romney's 16 percent and U.S. Rep. Ron Paul's 14 percent, according to a University of Texas/Texas Tribune poll released this week.

"Rick Santorum has cut through the clutter and emerged as not simply the non-Romney candidate but as the most credible conservative candidate in the race," said Daron Shaw, co-director of the poll and a professor of government at the University of Texas at Austin.

The poll has all four Republicans beating Obama in Texas. Santorum would win 51 percent to 37 percent; Gingrich 49 percent to 38 percent; Romney 49 percent to 36 percent; and Paul 44 percent to 35 percent.

Santorum heads to Austin today for a fundraiser at the Headliners Club before returning to Michigan for a series of events.

This report includes material from The Texas Tribune.

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