

Pizarro: Ron Gonzales to lead Hispanic Foundation

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Former San Jose Mayor Ron Gonzales is diving back into the spotlight as the new president and CEO of the Hispanic Foundation of Silicon Valley.

The foundation's board announced his appointment Friday, though it had been speculated for weeks that Gonzales would be the pick to replace Teresa Alvarado, who stepped down this year to run for the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors.

"It's kind of moving back to the public sector, where I spent a better part of my life," said the 58-year-old Gonzales, who also served as a Sunnyvale city councilman and county supervisor. "I'm looking forward to it."

Since leaving office under a cloud a little more than two years ago, Gonzales has run two small businesses: Presencia Technology and Presencia LLC, which provided consulting to tech companies wanting to do business with the government. But he said he was attracted to the new position because of the foundation's strategic plan, which will emphasize developing leadership and philanthropy within the valley's Latino community.

"The funding is needed so much in the Hispanic community. I know what it's like to be in an organization where the need far exceeds the funds," said Gonzales, who hopes to create partnerships with other agencies, businesses and minority-based organizations.

Building that network could be challenging for Gonzales. He lost supporters in the Latino community when he split from his popular wife, Alvina, following the revelation he'd had an affair with a staff member he later married. He also left office facing an indictment on bribery charges that were dismissed.

Are those rifts repaired enough for Gonzales to step back into a high-profile leadership role in Silicon Valley's Latino circles?

"I don't look backward," he said. "I don't think most people look backward; they look forward. I think the Hispanic community of Silicon Valley understands the need to come together and move forward."

Ivonne Montes de Oca, who cofounded the organization, said the board concentrated on Gonzales' qualifications as a manager and his

accomplishments, including fulfilling a pledge to have 10,000 affordable housing units built in San Jose during his tenure as mayor.

"He's extremely capable," said Montes de Oca, who's known Gonzales for more than a decade. "We feel he has all the qualifications to take the foundation to the next level. And he is well-connected in the community."

Gonzales is already working those connections, making sure everyone knows the foundation's big annual event, the Hispanic Charity Ball, is coming up Oct. 17.

"I wouldn't be doing a good job if I didn't mention it," he said.