

Judge has contempt for uncivil lawyers

Howe of Balto. Co. Circuit to be state bar president

By ELAINE TASSY
SUN STAFF

Make room for the new Miss Manners of Maryland lawyers.

Baltimore County Circuit Judge Barbara Kerr Howe, slated to become president of the Maryland State Bar Association tomorrow, says lawyers might need a statewide code of civility.

Such a code, which could be patterned after those created by bar associations in Baltimore and Baltimore County, would, for example, ask lawyers to return calls to each other and cooperate with opposing counsel when documents are sought.

"It's just that they would be courteous," Howe said, adding that a committee will look into the matter, which would ensure that localities have the same rules.

Howe, who has served 11 years on the bench in the county, is known as "Babs," a fun-loving, silver-haired grandmother who doesn't know her age or salary off-hand. She will continue to assign and preside over trial cases as the county's administrative judge while leading the voluntary association, which has about 18,000 members. She will succeed Robert T. Gonzales as president.

"I think Barbara's ability to lead the group is unquestioned," said Paul V. Carlin, the association's executive director. "She has excellent judgment skills, and an excellent understanding of how the organization works."

Her duties during her 12-month term as bar association president will be crammed into a schedule

overflowing with activities.

"I like to be a busy person," she said, sitting at the large desk in her office filled with legal books and family snapshots.

It started in childhood. At 10, she learned to type deeds, mortgages and letters for her father, an attorney who practiced law until he died at 85. At 19, she had graduated from Randolph Macon Woman's College, and by her mid-20s, she had married, had two children and worked as a legal secretary and a kindergarten teacher.

Then, over four years, she attended the University of Maryland Law School in the evenings and received her degree in 1969, one of three women in her graduating class.

She practiced law with her father and brother in Baltimore County, and later was a zoning hearing examiner for a decade in Harford County. That experience led to three years on the Baltimore County District Court bench and, in 1988, to a spot on the Circuit Court bench.

As a judge, Howe describes herself as impassive, able to separate her emotions from the facts. Sometimes she is deliberately intimidating, and her comments and questions to lawyers are often blunt and dry.

She has presided over some of the county's most well-known trials, including those of James Allan Kulbicki, the former Baltimore police sergeant who killed a woman with whom he had an affair, and Benjamin Scott Garris, the teen-ager who killed a Sheppard and Enoch Pratt Hospital counselor.

"Barbara's whole life's been very energetic; she's always on the go," said Judge John F. Fader II, a law school classmate whose court-



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Barbara Kerr Howe, Baltimore County Circuit judge, who is expected to become president of the Maryland State Bar Association tomorrow.

house office adjoins hers.

The twice-divorced mother of two — and grandmother of three — knows how to balance work and play. "I make decisions, and I let the case go. I don't second-guess myself," she said.

She doesn't concern herself with some of life's details, either. When asked her age, for example, she smiled and said, "I don't keep track." Then she took a black pen, subtracted dates on her desk calendar and pronounced herself 57.

Asked what a judge earns, she replied, "I don't have the slightest idea. The check comes into my back account, I spend it, and the next check comes." Then she pulled out a pay stub and the same pen to do some multiplying. The salary: \$93,600.

The next step, she hopes, is a spot on the Maryland Court of Special Appeals — for which she once was passed over — or the Maryland Court of Appeals, the state's highest court.