

## Politician given second chance

# Balto. co. GOP revives Boozer's career

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Above the din of chatter and anxious joking, Bob Latshaw greeted his close friend Vernon Boozer, wanting to know his outlook for the evening.

"I really feel funny about this," Mr. Boozer said. "I'm not in a strong position." Mr. Latshaw tried to settle him down. "I feel good," he said.

The two were among more than two dozen Baltimore county Republicans who jammed a tiny office in Towson less than two weeks ago. Spirals of cigarette smoke wound their way upward and hung over the crowd, prompting jokes about old-fashioned backroom ploys.

That meeting revived the political fortunes of F. Vernon Boozer, 44, a former two-term state delegate who seemed to vanish from party affairs after a humiliating defeat in the 1978 election. He says his party has given him a "second chance."

It also affirmed the salesmanship of Robert E. Latshaw, Jr., another former delegate whose seat once adjoined Mr. Boozer's. By most accounts, the prominent realtor masterminded Mr. Boozer's comeback.

Twenty-three party central committee members chose Mr. Boozer at that Towson meeting to replace former 10th District Senator John J. Bishop, Jr., who received an appointment in August to the Court of Special Appeals.

The district stretches from Towson to the edge of Parkville.

As Mr. Boozer formally took office last Wednesday, county Republicans and Democrats still were wondering how it happened.

Some attributed his selection to what they called his ability as a "shrewd political strategist," some pointed to Mr. Latshaw as a kingmaker and others saw a combination of the two.

Mr. Boozer had been regarded widely as the dark horse contender among six candidates. Several informal polls put him directly behind former County Councilman Eugene L. Kibbe, Jr., and Joseph M. Ayd, a party activist.

"I think Vernon is rather skillful in orchestrating certain moves in the Republican Central Committee that have been beneficial to him," observed Delegate Mark C. Medairy, Jr., one of the Democrats responsible for unseating Mr. Boozer three years ago.

"Vernon was there at the right time and the right place, and it takes a shrewd politician to do that," said a prominent Republican, who asked not to be named.

"He was just lucky to get that," said a GOP central committee member who thought Mr. Boozer could not have won without Mr. Latshaw's help.

Mr. Boozer said in an interview last week that he really was surprised by the victory, and called claims of his shrewd-



F. Vernon Boozer's "low-key" campaign got him back into the state Senate.

ness "exaggerated." He said, "If I told you I was sure of that outcome, I'd be a liar."

But he said he did not "owe" his selection to Mr. Latshaw, whom he described as one of several persons who helped him.

Mr. Latshaw claims to have been behind a month-long "soft sell" campaign to promote Mr. Boozer's candidacy among central committee members without demanding votes or counting heads.

He refused to take any credit for Mr. Boozer's ascent to the state Senate, saying "100 percent" should go to the candidate. He said he acted simply as a salesman.

"I could do a very soft sell for Vernon, pressing the fact that it's our responsibility to find not only a good candidate for 1982, but the best, intelligent legislator we could send to Annapolis," Mr. Latshaw said, recalling his pitch to Republicans.

"I did not ask them to vote for Vernon. I told them, 'Here's why I think Vernon will be a good state senator,'" he said.

"I am a salesman. You don't sell anything by hitting people over the head. You have to have product knowledge, and I know my product," Mr. Latshaw said. "You can't sell bad soap. All the Madison avenue advertising in the world can't sell bad soap."

Mr. Latshaw won the "Realtor of the Year" award recently from the Maryland Association of Realtors.

He and others who know the new senator said Mr. Boozer's "low key" personality set the tone of his campaign. But some saw this as part of the weakness in a candidate who had been invisible in the party since 1978.

His critics saw him as an opportunist who made apologies for losing three years ago and who did not seem as hungry for the Senate seat as an ambitious, handsome young Turk like Mr. Ayd or the popular, ebullient—some say blowhard—Mr. Kibbe.

But his supporters privately denigrated Mr. Kibbe as a loudmouthed politician who assumed he'd be rewarded for attending every party bullroast. They said Mr. Ayd lacked a sense of humor and a track record in the legislature and at the ballot box.

Mr. Boozer said he asked House Minority Leader Raymond E. Beck (R, Carroll county), and House Judiciary Committee chairman Joseph E. Owens (D, Montgomery county) to write "letters of recommendation" to the central committee.

His supporters said his manner contrasted so sharply with that of Mr. Kibbe that an eleventh-hour coalition fell together, with anti-Kibbe voters joining deserters from Mr. Ayd's camp who sensed a Boozer victory.

That gave Mr. Boozer just enough votes to counter a hardcore anti-Boozer faction and seize 13 of 23 votes on a winning third ballot. Mr. Ayd placed second with 6. Mr. Kibbe placed third with 3.

Mr. Kibbe, who expected to win, has been bitter ever since. An hour after the election, he announced his retirement from county Republican Party politics, accusing colleagues of "repudiating" his past service.

His attacks have sharpened since then.

In a letter mailed last Wednesday to the central committee, he linked the outcome to "pressure from persons who are neither active in the Baltimore county Republican Party, nor are they elected Republicans from Baltimore county."

In another thinly veiled reference, Mr. Kibbe accused the party of rewarding "inactivity."

The party was "manipulated by an individual whose... political theories provided the opening through which the Democratic Party gained a foothold in the 10th District seven years ago and prevented his own reelection at the time," he said.

Mr. Boozer acknowledges that he has not been active within the party since 1978, but reports having done "community service." He now talks of leading a well-disciplined ticket in the 1982 election to help the party.

As for Mr. Kibbe's other references, Mr. Latshaw lost his own 10th District delegate seat in 1974, allowing Democrat Thomas B. Kernan to break a Republican grip on the district's three House seats.

Mr. Latshaw responded by denying the use of "pressure" on behalf of Mr. Boozer. He added that he quit campaigning before the 1974 election due to bleeding ulcers, not because of manipulation or miscalculated strategies.

"I hope Gene'll cool down one of these days," Mr. Boozer said. "He should be a grown man and accept defeat and move forward."

Friends and critics of Mr. Boozer said that he, unlike Mr. Kibbe, rarely holds grudges or displays bitterness after defeat.

Mr. Boozer himself said he campaigns the way he lobbies for legislation—by offering as much "information" as possible to encourage "a good, honest decision. Of course I hope it's in my favor, but after it's over I go on to the next thing."

He can be intense, devoting all his attention toward a single goal, but it is hard to tell on the surface. "Politics is a tough business; it's a pretty ruthless business," Mr. Boozer said. "I don't like it when things get to that point."

Both he and Delegate Medairy, who is likely to be his adversary in the next general election, predicted they will have no problems working in Annapolis together in January. They called each other longtime friends.

"Vernon will be formidable opposition, no doubt about it," Mr. Medairy said. He questioned Mr. Boozer's ability to woo Democratic votes, which would be necessary to assure his reelection, and criticized him for being "out of contact" with community groups in the last few years.

But Mr. Medairy added: "Don't let his appearance fool you."

Mr. Boozer agreed he often is misread or misunderstood. "I'm not a very outgoing, emotional guy," he said.