

In Dundalk, Arnick elicits strong opinion

Zealous support, sharp criticism voiced at home

By Robert A. Erlandson
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As a powerful state delegate and local lawyer, John S. Arnick has been a familiar figure in Dundalk for more than 30 years.

But now he's a household name as he battles for his District Court judgeship in the face of allegations that he has made racially and sexually offensive remarks to others, particularly after a few drinks.

"The subject has been on everyone's lips in Dundalk," said Edward C. Lambdin, an accountant who said he knows Mr. Arnick but has never had dealings with him.

While calls from outraged constituents may have caused many senators to reconsider their votes for his nomination, random interviews with residents of his home turf still show strong, although not unanimous, support for Mr. Arnick.

Mr. Lambdin and Mr. Arnick are both members of the Sparrows Point Country Club. "I see him at the club all summer and I have never seen him drunk," Mr. Lambdin said. "I've seen him at Chamber of Commerce meetings and I've never seen anything out of the way."

Norma Arthur, a Dundalk resident since 1922 and now retired, offered the opposite view. "I know a lot about him, and I never did care for his demeanor, the remarks he makes. He has an air that he's better than everyone else," she said.

Asked about the specific allegations about Mr. Arnick's crude references to women and minorities, Ms. Arthur replied, "With his attitude, I wouldn't put it past him. I don't want to see him on the bench, I'm dead set against him."

The uproar began when Judith A. Wolfer, a Takoma Park lawyer and former lobbyist, told the Senate Executive Nominations Committee last week that Mr. Arnick, then chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, referred to women as "bitches" and told crude ethnic jokes during a

dinner meeting on a domestic violence bill.

Subsequently, her story was confirmed by Nancy J. Nowak, a former aide to Gov. William Donald Schaefer who is now the director of parole and probation for the state.

The committee voted 14-4 on Friday to confirm the ten-year appointment. The full Senate postponed a vote on the nomination Monday at Mr. Arnick's request.

There is no doubt that Mr. Arnick remains popular in Dundalk, where hundreds of people signed petitions in his favor Monday for presentation to the Maryland Senate.

Gary Norton, a Dundalk jeweler, and Carol Minardo, a gift shop owner, were both passionate in their support. "I think his legislative abilities prove his judicial ability. His record speaks for itself," Mr. Norton said.

"I think what they're doing is ridiculous," Miss Minardo said. "There's more to it than those women are talking about."

Mary Louise Waite said she has known Mr. Arnick for ten years, and sees him at various functions. "He's always been a gentleman," she said. "He's human, but I don't think he did that [what Ms. Wolfer alleged]. He's got too much class. He has always given me respect as a woman."

Doris Wines, a waitress at Minnick's, a favorite Dundalk watering-hole for the politically attuned, said she has known Mr. Arnick "at least 36 years" and "I've never heard him make a derogatory remark to anyone. He doesn't strike me as a rough man."

Others, however, say Mr. Arnick has offended people.

"I don't think John always exercises as much discretion as he should in his speech," said Pat Winter, executive director of the Eastern Baltimore Area Chamber of Commerce. "But that doesn't change the fact that he has been a good legislator. He has been in the leadership twice."

Rosemary Skierski, cashier at a Dundalk pharmacy, questioned whether Mr. Arnick could be an impartial judge if the allegations are true. "It makes you wonder," she said, criticizing what she sees as an attempt to rush the nomination through. "I don't think the real people are getting a fair shake."