

Davidson joins 'male bastion'

Annapolis Bureau of The Sun

Annapolis—In the words of the chief judge yesterday, Rita C. Davidson pierced the "all-male bastion" of the Maryland Court of Appeals as she was sworn in as the first woman on the state's highest court.

Judge Davidson's "new boss," Chief Judge Robert C. Murphy, said that he and his five male colleagues "were in conference most of the day, preparing burselves, steeling ourselves, for the first onslaught of feminism in the 200 years of our court."

"The piercing of our all-male bastion will get some getting used to," Judge Murphy commented. But he said Mrs. Davidson was more than the court's first woman.

"More than that, she is the court's first Jewish mother," he said to the laughter of an audience of several hundred persons in the chambers of the House of Delegates.

"Profanity will surely subside, man-

ners will improve, we will all dress warmly for court and we will all clean our plates," Judge Murphy said.

Judge Murphy, a member of the court's conservative wing, said: "I say all this in the hope that on occasion she may cast her vote with me on some of the close votes, with which the court has been plagued in recent times."

Judge Murphy's remark, though humorous, pointed out the influence Judge Davidson may wield on the court, which has been closely divided in a number of recent decisions.

A liberal, she is likely to cast her votes against Judge Murphy, thus continuing the gradual liberal shift inspired in part by the man she succeeds, Judge Irving A. Levine, who died last fall.

Judge Davidson spoke briefly, thanking Mr. Lee ("who gave me the name 'Big Momma'"), her family, her colleagues on the Court of Special Appeals, to which she was appointed six years ago, and her friends with words that

brought tears to the eyes of many in the audience.

Of her fellow judges on the lower court she said, "They stayed by me in sickness and in health until the Governor of the State of Maryland did us part."

Mrs. Davidson, 50, was appointed to the court by Mr. Lee, who made special arrangements with Governor Mandel to be the acting Governor for an hour yesterday for her swearing-in.

She recently recovered from a two-year bout with cancer that her doctors had feared she would not survive.

Mr. Lee, obviously proud of his choice, said: "I predict that over the years she will become one of the greatest judges on the court."

"Don't regard this as the last in her long string of firsts," he told the audience. "We shall see what we shall see," he said, suggesting what many of her friends think that she could become the first woman on the United States Supreme Court.



Sun photo—Weyman Sweeper
Blair Lee 3d, acting governor again for an hour, administers oath to Judge Rita C. Davidson, whom he had named as the first woman member of the state Court of Appeals.