

# Anne Arundel Honors a 'Native Son'

*Eldridge Praised at Event for Lawyers, Legislators, Judges*

**EARL KELLY**

*Daily Record Legal Affairs Writer*

Attorneys, judges and legislators gathered at Loews Annapolis Hotel to honor Court of Appeals Judge John C. "Jack" Eldridge Tuesday evening, as the Anne Arundel County Bar Association started something new: hosting a dinner where members of the three key groups could meet on common ground.

"Judge Eldridge was honored as an Anne Arundel native son, and he has contributed so much to the judiciary over the years, he seemed a natural," said Deborah L. Potter, association president.

Eldridge, 66, worked as chief legislative aide to Gov. Marvin Mandel who appointed him to the Court of Appeals in



MAXIMILIAN FRANZ

Court of Appeals Judge John C. Eldridge, left, was joined Tuesday by Court of Special Appeals Chief Judge Joseph F. Murphy Jr., at an Anne Arundel County Bar Association dinner honoring Eldridge, who has served on the state's top court since 1974.

January 1974.

"I think it was one of the great appointments I made," Mandel said during the reception before dinner. "If I had to rate

my appointments, Jack would be at the top."

Eldridge's remarks illustrated the intersection between the ju-

SEE ELDRIDGE PAGE 2C

# Eldridge

Continued from page 1C

diciary, the General Assembly and the bar through the centuries.

The first appeal on writ of error went to the Court of Appeals in 1664, Eldridge said. It was a defamation action and on appeal the plaintiff lost his judgement of 30,000 pounds of tobacco.

"[I]n recent years, plaintiffs' judgments in defamation cases have not fared much better in the Court of Appeals. The problem with defamation cases, of course, is the tension between defamation actions and the rights to free speech and free press," Eldridge told his dinner audience. "From the earliest times, the Maryland General Assembly and judiciary have zealously guarded ... free speech, free press."

The dinner, organized by the 850-member Anne Arundel County Bar Association, attracted all of Eldridge's colleagues on the Court of Appeals, eight members of the Court of Special Appeals, 15 Anne Arundel County judges, about 15 members of the General Assembly and about 90 area attorneys, said Fran Czajka, bar association executive director.

The judge who sits beside Eldridge on the state's highest court praised him as a jurist and as a person.

"He has been a mentor and a friend. He's an intellectual giant and the breadth of his experience is a great treasure to the court," said Judge Irma S. Raker.

## Changing demographics

Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller Jr., D-Prince George's, whose district includes a small part of Anne Arundel County, lamented that most of

the legislators left between the reception and dinner — as well as the decreased numbers of lawyers in the legislature.

"Half of the Senate were attorneys when I came [in 1975]. Now, attorneys aren't running for public office," Miller said.

The change in political demographics has hurt the legislative process, Miller said, because lawmakers often do not appreciate a judge's role and do not understand the legal system.

Chief Judge Robert M. Bell told the audience that Eldridge has been an asset to the state's legal system.

"He came to the court wise in the ways of the legislature," Bell said. "His longevity on the bench provides continuity; he provides institutional memory."

In his 26 years on the court, Eldridge has penned 486 majority opinions, 128

dissenting opinions and 54 concurrences, Bell said.

"It's been an enjoyable 26 years, I've loved every day of it," Eldridge said.

While working as Mandel's aide, Eldridge served on a committee that was tasked with drafting constitutional amendments. Those amendments created the district court system and the office of lieutenant governor, and set the number of members of the General Assembly.

Eldridge's efforts also produced the public defender system in Maryland, Court of Special Appeals Chief Judge Joseph F. Murphy Jr. said in an interview.

"Those are remarkable achievements," Murphy said. "Any one would have been a remarkable achievement for any administration and they had them one right after another."

"I think it  
was one of the  
great  
appointments  
I made."

Marvin Mandel