

# Mrs. Lambert Draws Criticism Over Fund-Raising Party for Her

## Question Raised Over Surrogate-Elect's Judicial Ethics

By TOM GOLDSTEIN

A month ago, Marie M. Lambert became the first woman elected Surrogate in Manhattan, and three weeks ago she celebrated her 57th birthday. So yesterday, some of her friends gave a \$250-a-person birthday party "to help make a dent in reducing the campaign deficit" of nearly \$175,000.

But the guest of honor did not show up and neither did most of those invited to the party, which has created a furor in the legal community.

"I had originally planned to go," said Mrs. Lambert, who was at home yesterday afternoon. She said she had had nothing to do with organizing the party, which at the last moment was switched from the Top of the Beekman Tower to a smaller room in the Grenadier restaurant.

"But," Mrs. Lambert said, "I learned that a judicial candidate is not allowed to know the names of any people who contribute to the campaign. As much as I wanted to go to the party, I did not want to attract criticism. I have to go into that court with an unblemished reputation."

The invitation to the party featured Mrs. Lambert's name in large type.

Those receiving the invitations were asked to respond to "Friends of Marie M. Lambert" at 135 William Street, the address of Katz, Shandell, Katz, Erasmus & Marie M. Lambert, the firm in which Mrs. Lambert is a partner. Those who were invited were told a table of 10 would cost \$2,500.

Many lawyers felt the lavish party bordered on the improper, since judges and judicial candidates, to avoid even the appearance of favoritism, are sharply limited in the ways they can raise funds.

### 100 Said to Have Been Expected

Adrian W. DeWind, the president of the City Bar Association, said yesterday that the party was "manifestly improper."

"Simply stated, it stinks," said Justice James J. Leff of State Supreme Court in a letter sent to, but not published by, The New York Law Journal.

As one of Manhattan's two Surrogates, Mrs. Lambert will oversee the disposition of estates and will appoint lawyers as guardians for the young and the incompetent. Those appointments are often highly prized by lawyers.

Many lawyers invited to yesterday's party specialize in trusts and estates work.

According to Gary L. Nicholson, the chairman of the Lambert campaign, 100 people were expected in the dimly lighted bar area of the restaurant.

In the last two weeks, at some of Manhattan's most prestigious law firms, meetings of partners were held, and decisions were made to boycott the party.

In the last few days, the switchboard operators at the City Bar Association were busy fielding complaints about the party. Several lawyers sent copies of the invitation to the State Commission on Judicial Conduct.

Under state law, the commission has jurisdiction only over sitting judges, and Mrs. Lambert takes office Jan. 1. But once a judge is sitting, the commission can



The New York Times

Marie M. Lambert

examine the judge's behavior during the campaign.

Gerald Stern, the administrator of the commission, said yesterday that no decision had been taken whether to investigate the Lambert party. A judge can be censured, suspended or removed for violating the Code of Judicial Conduct.

The code itself is somewhat blurred in discussing the specifics of fund-raising activities.

But, according to a summary of guidelines issued by the Committee on Professional Ethics of the New York State Bar Association, contributions to judicial campaigns should "not be out of line."

"Unreasonably large contributions look like attempts to curry favor with the candidate," the committee said.

### Given 'Not Approved' Rating

The summary of the campaign guidelines also says that "parties to and lawyers participating in suits now or recently pending or likely to come before the candidate should not be solicited."

"Whether or not the party is a technical violation of the Code of Judicial Conduct, it seems to me the sponsors of such a party are doing something that is manifestly inappropriate," said Mr. DeWind of the bar association.

"The fact that Judge-elect Lambert perceived subsequently she shouldn't appear at this party is some recognition of its inappropriateness."

During the Democratic primary, in which she upset the incumbent, Arthur Blyn, and again in the campaign for the general election, Mrs. Lambert ran an aggressive advertising campaign. This, in part, accounted for the "not approved" rating given her by the executive committee of the City Bar Association, which said she had failed "to conduct her campaign within the standards of the Code of Judicial Conduct."

On her latest financial disclosure, which was filed last Friday with the State Board of Elections, Mrs. Lambert's campaign committee listed contributions of \$45,000 from Oct. 25 to Nov. 24. The largest contribution—\$4,950—came from the Women's Institute for Better Probate & Trust Administration, which listed a Ft. Lee, N.J., address.

Mrs. Lambert also listed outstanding liabilities of \$75,000 and outstanding loans of \$23,000, making hers one of the most expensive local judicial campaigns in New York history.

NY Times 12/5/77