

Madeira, commissioners point fingers over Arnold

by L. Reidar Jensen

Former Centre County Assistant District Attorney Karen Arnold lashed out at District Attorney Michael Madeira and county administrators at a press conference Jan. 5 for the manner in which she was released from her post the morning Madeira took office.

During his first hours on the job Jan. 3, Madeira beckoned Arnold into his office with his index finger, spoke to her for five minutes about their differing philosophies and showed her the door, informing her that she had two hours to clean out her office, Arnold said.

Arnold, who worked for 19 years as a Centre County assistant district attorney and ran as the Democratic candidate against Madeira for district attorney in November, said she was dismayed by her release, only one year away from the 20 years required for Centre County employees to collect their pensions upon retirement.

"In light of my level of dedication and the accomplishments that have benefited every citizen in Centre County, the manner in which Centre County government carried this out is, to me, almost beyond belief," said Arnold.

Arnold said she had been warned by two different individuals (whom she declined to name) within Centre County government that she would not be reappointed when Madeira took office, but wasn't officially told of her release until Madeira told her she had two hours to leave.

"Only because [I heard of my termination in advance] did I have the option of spending the holidays attempting to prepare instructions on pending cases and attempt-

"Karen was a very, very dedicated attorney ... anytime you lose somebody with 19 years of experience, it always leaves a void."

--Centre County Commissioner Scott Conklin

ing to clean out the accumulated paperwork of many years in my office," said Arnold.

Arnold's unfinished cases now fall into the hands of the district attorney.

"[Madeira is] responsible to the voters for running his office," said Centre County Commissioner Chris Exarchos, a Republican. "If there are cases loose and not taken care of, he's going to have to answer to the voters for that."

Democratic Centre County Commissioner Scott Conklin said he was dismayed by Arnold's release.

"Karen was a very, very dedicated attorney. People I talked to always spoke of her highly. Anytime you have somebody with 19 years of experience, it always leaves a void," Conklin said. "I would have liked to see Karen stay on for the extra year to be able to collect her 20-year [pension]."

During their meeting, Arnold said Madeira told her "the county told me that I had to handle it this way." When pressed for more information, Madeira said his actions were directed by Centre County Director of Human Resources Mark Hendrickson and the county commissioners.

However, according to Hendrickson, neither he nor the commissioners had a hand in Arnold's release.

"This is something that Mike Madeira initiated. This is nothing that was instigated by myself or the commissioners, I can assure you of that. That's unquestionable and indisputable."

As to why Madeira would have told Arnold he was involved, Hendrickson was perplexed.

"I don't know why Mr. Madeira would have said [that I was involved]," said Hendrickson.

"Regarding any manager, department head or supervisor [such as Madeira], if they have an opinion in terms of terminating or not reappointing someone, it's protocol to consult with an HR director. All [Madeira] asked me for was instruction in terms of whether or not [Arnold's release] was being done correctly according to procedure. Yes, it was."

Conklin and Exarchos, too, denied any involvement in Arnold's release.

"The district attorney is an independent elected official. He doesn't work for the commissioners," Exarchos said. "There's no way I can tell him to do anything. He chooses, he hires, he fires, he's responsible for his staff, so I don't see what Ms. Arnold meant. Mr. Madeira had a courtesy call in our office prior to taking his office and he did inform us that he was going to make personnel changes, but he didn't need to ask our permission."

According to both Conklin and Exarchos, an assistant district attorney is much like a sheriff's deputy or a cabinet member at the White House: they serve at the pleasure of the boss.

Because of this, Conklin said he believes Arnold was not fired; she simply was not



Photo courtesy of Karen Arnold
Karen Arnold, Centre County's former assistant district attorney.

reappointed. That, he said, is an important distinction.

"Karen Arnold was never terminated. When a new DA comes in, he gets to appoint his staff. When you're appointed as an ADA, you're an ADA for his tenure as DA. Every time he's reelected, he must reappoint those individuals," said Conklin. "In my opinion, and the reason I believe she is still eligible for her all retirement, is that her appointment expired as of January 1, 2006."

Whether or not Arnold is eligible for full retirement benefits is still a point of contention. She would not discuss the possibility of legal action against the county, except to say that she has contacted an attorney.

Pennacchio takes on Democratic Party in primary

by Suzan Erem

Chuck Pennacchio, a relatively unknown Democratic candidate for U.S. Senate, didn't pull any punches when he came to State College in mid-January to launch a local campaign committee.

"The Democratic Party believes you can out-Santorum Santorum," he told a crowd of more than 60 people, many of them hardcore Democratic Party activists, at a meeting at the State College Municipal Building. "It wants to out-right the right. The Democratic Party is best when it's true to its values."

Pennacchio (pronounced with a "k" for the "ch"), a history professor from the

Philadelphia area, is running against Democratic Party favorite Bob Casey, Jr., current state treasurer. Casey, who garnered a record number of votes in the last treasurer's election, is the son of a former Pennsylvania governor. He is a staunch Catholic who has vowed on the record to help overturn Roe v. Wade, according to Pennacchio. (Casey's Web site offers no position on women's issues or the war.) Casey's campaign is supported by political action committees, 239 of which also donated directly or indirectly to Santorum (according to a Pennacchio campaign analysis of 2005 Federal Election Commission documents), and Casey has declined to call for a withdrawal of troops

from Iraq. In discussing the war at the October 2005 Centre County Democratic Party dinner, Casey called for better body armor for the troops but fell far short of proposing an exit strategy.

Pennacchio supports women's control over their reproduction, has articulated an exit strategy for Iraq, and calls for a universal health care plan driven by the federal government that guarantees decision making at the state and local levels. He does not accept PAC funds from corporations or groups.

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Photo by Suzan Erem

Chuck Pennacchio, a Democrat running for the U.S. Senate, spoke in State College in January.