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**HEADLINE:** Drama in 44th: Mitchell heir vs. friends of the family

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**BODY:**

At high noon on a steamy summer day, Clarence M. Mitchell IV stands outside the Eutaw Street entrance to Lexington Market, pressing the flesh of lunch goers and passing out a brochure touting his campaign for House of Delegates in the 44th Legislative District.

Some react to the slender young man in the dark suit indifferently; some respond quizzically, as if trying to connect the face with the famous name.

But others are enthusiastic.

"Oh, Clarence," Delores McKay says effusively. "I know your father."

Such recognition of the Mitchell family name, and the way it resonates through much of the district, is creating personal and political concern among the three House incumbents.

All are one-time members of the Mitchell family political organization who are running together in the Sept. 13 Democratic primary on a ticket dubbed "Our Neighborhood Team."

"It's difficult when you have in the past been allies with a family," says Del. Elijah E. Cummings, 43, who is seeking his fourth term and is considered by many to be the most invulnerable of the triumvirate. "That's why all of us have vowed that this would be a very high-road campaign. I have seen nothing to contradict that."

Del. John D. Jefferies, 66, a machinists' union official who has the strong backing of organized labor in his bid for a second full term,

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complains that Mr. Mitchell has a thin record of service.

But Mr. Jefferies admits that, because of the name, Mr. Mitchell is a force to be reckoned with. "It's up to me to let the people know what I've done," he says.

Del. Ruth M. Kirk, 64, also seeking her fourth term, is outspoken about her displeasure with Mr. Mitchell's run for a House seat.

"I told the little boy I could spank his little tail," she says.

"The Mitchell boy is running because his name is a Mitchell," she adds.

"His family wants him to have a seat. They feel the seat belongs to the Mitchell family."

Mr. Mitchell, 32, titular head of the family bail bond and insurance business, is hardly shy about his invoking the rich legacy of his family -- which includes his late grandfather, Clarence M. Mitchell Jr., the revered Capitol Hill lobbyist for the NAACP; his late grandmother, Juanita Jackson Mitchell, a longtime local NAACP leader and legal counsel; and his great-uncle, Parren J. Mitchell, who was elected Maryland's first black congressman in 1970 and retired in 1986.

His father, Clarence M. Mitchell III, served for 24 years in the state Senate before losing in his attempt to succeed Parren in 1986; his uncle, Michael Mitchell, was a Baltimore City councilman and state senator. Their political careers ended in 1987 with their corruption convictions on charges of taking money to improperly impede a congressional investigation.

Indeed, Mr. Mitchell's campaign literature touts him as "A Fighter for the People" who "represents another generation of FREEDOM FIGHTERS."

Citing his 12 years of experience on the Democratic State Central Committee and involvement in such activities as a member of the School Improvement Team at Samuel Coleridge Taylor Elementary School, he says in an interview, "I tell people I am my own person but I stand on a strong foundation."

"I'm for real with this," he adds. "This is not an ego thing."

Mr. Mitchell is not the only challenger in the center-city district. In all, there are 10 candidates for the House seats, including the three incumbents.

That is the second-largest number of House candidates in any of the city's eight districts, behind only the 40th.

The reason for the crowded field, political observers agree, is redistricting.

What politicians are calling the "new" 44th is actually about 75 percent of what for the last decade was the 39th. (The 39th no longer exists in the

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city). Gone is most of low-income Nehemiah Housing project; added is part of upscale Bolton Hill. The district is more than 80 percent black; it encompasses the Inner Harbor and Belvedere areas as well as the Edgar Allan Poe Homes and impoverished areas around Bon Secours Hospital.

Besides Mr. Mitchell, the challengers drawing the most attention are John E. Hannay, an administrator with the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, and Verna Jones, a housing activist. Each is making a first run for elective office -- and each is critical of the visibility and performance of the incumbents.

"When I go door-to-door, I find a lot of people don't even know who the delegates are," says Mr. Hannay, 39, who has been active in a number of civil rights issues, including gay rights.

Ms. Jones, 38, says she doesn't believe the incumbents have been as effective as they could be in "garnering resources" and adds, "This is a new day. It's time for new energy and new ideas."

Mr. Mitchell refuses to criticize the incumbents but sounds much the same theme.

Conceding that he's "not really sure" if he differs from them on any issues, he says, "My knock is not against them for being inadequate. It's not what they haven't done. It's we need a new vision, a new energy."

State Sen. Larry Young doesn't agree.

Mr. Young remembers well the summer of 1974, when then-Sen. Clarence Mitchell III dropped one of the three House incumbents and added Mr. Young to his ticket. Even so, Mr. Young, who faces only token opposition in his own race, is spurning his political godfather's son and running with the three incumbent delegates.

"It was a tough decision because of the love I have to this day for the man who gave me my political start," Mr. Young says, referring to the elder Mr. Mitchell.

About candidate Mitchell, to whom he refers affectionately as "Four," Mr. Young says, "I have nothing negative to say."

But he quickly reels off what he sees as the attributes of the incumbents: Mr. Cummings, vice chair of the House Economic Matters Committee and "one of the most articulate members of the legislature;" Mr. Jefferies, chairman of the Legislative Black Caucus and versed in employee issues; Ms. Kirk, head of the Women's Legislative Caucus and a "grass-roots person."

"If it wasn't for the fact that 'four' is a Mitchell, my three delegates would find they were in a comfortable position," Mr. Young says.

If his races for the State Central Committee are any indication of his vote-pulling ability, Mr. Mitchell will indeed be a formidable foe. In 1982,

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1986 and 1990, he was the highest vote-getter by far in his district among all committee candidates.

But, perhaps tellingly, he drew far fewer votes in 1990, after his father and uncle's legal troubles, than he did in 1982, when his family was at the height of its political power.

Saying he has gotten to the point where he can talk about their cases "without being emotional," Mr. Mitchell says, "I stand with my father and uncle in proclaiming their innocence."

He notes with pride how a community fund-raising effort came up with tens of thousands of dollars to save his grandmother's house from auction, after she was left broke helping to finance her two sons' legal battles.

"What we found out was how the community cared about us," he says, "and how the community understood how we cared."

What that mutual concern will be worth at the ballot box will be known next month.

CAMPAIGN 1994

**GRAPHIC:** PHOTO, AMY DEPUTY/SUN STAFF PHOTO, Clarence Mitchell IV talks with voters while campaigning outside Lexington Market.; MAP, ROBERT CRONIAN/STAFF GRAPHIC, 44TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

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