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## Ex-ship captain trades helm for admiralty law practice

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Prior to becoming a lawyer focusing on admiralty law, Timothy S. McGovern worked as a captain on a ship docked at Navy Pier.

McGovern, 35, who recently joined Swanson, Martin & Bell LLP, helmed the Spirit of Chicago for two years in the late 1990s. He's chairman of the firm's admiralty, maritime and transportation practice group.

When McGovern, a Chicago native, was a senior in high school, he saw a notice for a job fair to be hosted on board the Spirit of Chicago. So, McGovern and some friends attended the job fair and were hired as deck hands, he said.

"I moved up the ranks over the years" working during summers and on weekends, McGovern said.

Some ship employees encouraged McGovern to take the examination for a master's license from the U.S. Coast Guard, he said.

"As luck would have it, I passed my examination and received what is essentially a captain's license," McGovern said. "At the same time, there was a full-time captain's position on the Spirit of Chicago in 1997."

The following summer, McGovern, fellow crew members and about 400 passengers experienced a rough storm on Lake Michigan. The Coast Guard issued a warning that a "squall line" was coming through in about 20 minutes with about 80-mile an hour winds, McGovern said.

"So we got ourselves in the best position possible out on the lake, got all the passengers in places of safety and when the squall hit, it was really extraordinary," McGovern said. "There were ash trays on the exterior of the ship that shot off like bullets."



Timothy S. McGovern

McGovern said he represents the ship's parent company, Entertainment Cruises Inc, in two matters.

McGovern said he became interested in a legal career while attending the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. His uncle, lawyer Edward James McGovern, encouraged him to pursue a legal career, Timothy McGovern said.

While finishing up at The John Marshall Law School, McGovern worked as a law clerk for Michael A. Snyder, whose practice included maritime and admiralty law.

After passing the Illinois bar and being admitted to practice in November 2001, McGovern joined the law firm where Snyder was a partner at the time — Conklin, Murphy, Conklin & Snyder.

In 2005, Snyder and McGovern formed a partnership known as Snyder, McGovern LLC.

Snyder, whom McGovern called his mentor, died earlier this year.

McGovern said his background as a ship captain helps in understanding what the people do on a ship's deck.

"For an area of the law as specific as maritime law, it also helps to know the language so to speak," McGovern said, referring to words such as port and starboard sides.

McGovern and the Swanson, Martin & Bell firm also represent some of the largest steamship lines. McGovern and other firm members handle ship collision cases, along with personal-injury defense and defend against cargo container damage and loss claims, for clients, including Hanjin Shipping, he said.

Timothy G. Nickels, managing partner of Swanson, Martin & Bell with about 100 lawyers, said McGovern's addition represents kind of a new venture for the firm.

"We've had some admiralty experience in the past, but never had a lawyer whose practice is dedicated to that area," Nickels said. "We're very excited to have him."

McGovern is a proctor member of the Maritime Law Association of the United States and serves as president of the Propeller Club for the Port of Chicago. He also is an adjunct law professor at The John Marshall Law School.

Ian S. Botnick, 27, is another recent addition to Swanson, Martin & Bell as an associate in the firm's Lisle office. Botnick previously worked as an associate with Fisher and Shapiro LLC in Bannockburn.

Botnick handles mortgage foreclosure matters and defends against breach of auto warranty claims.

"It's a real diverse practice and everybody has been real welcoming," Botnick said.