

A sidebar with ... James Murray

By: Thomas Franz ■ in News Stories ○ October 11, 2019

Plunkett Cooney attorney James J. Murray’s family history on Mackinac Island goes back nearly 200 years.

Murray, the managing partner of Plunkett Cooney’s Petoskey office, was recently elected chair of the Mackinac Island Community Foundation Board of Trustees.



Murray

He spoke with *Michigan Lawyers Weekly* about his family history on the island and how he can impact the community with his new position.

Your family history dates back to 1839 on the island, how were you able to trace that and what do you know about those original settlers?

It’s actually pretty easy because they’re all buried in our family cemetery on the island. I’m the fourth generation. Our generations are spread out a bit because my great-grandfather came from Ireland in 1839 and there are records of that and he’s buried there.

Two other families came from the same town in Ireland in the late 1830s and also settled on the island.

Do you have any insight into why they settled there?

Mackinac Island during those years was the hub of the entire Midwest area because of the fur trade. There was a lot of commerce and opportunity up there in that straits area. My great-grandfather came and ultimately was one of the sheriffs in that era and also built the Murray Hotel. Rumor has it that he went to California during the gold rush and came back with his money to build the Murray Hotel.

What about the rest of your family on the island?

My grandfather was a probate judge for Mackinac County for over 40 years in the early 1900s, and he’s buried in our cemetery. He was also the mayor in the early 1900s. My father was a lawyer in the Detroit area and he’s buried here too. I’m not only the fourth generation to be on the island but also in the law.

With your new position, what duties does being chair of the Community Foundation Board entail?

Like a chairman of any board with a board of trustees, I will run the meetings and work with the executive director. I will sit on multiple committees. The Mackinac Island Foundation has about eight different funds so I’ll work with the executive director and different committee members who work on these special funds but I will oversee them all.

With so many family and professional ties to the island, what does holding this position mean to you?

It brings it all together with my family history, my experience as an attorney and my commitment to community foundations.

You practice in business, government and banking groups, how do those areas lend themselves to the island?

I represent multiple generations of families with both their business needs and real estate succession planning. I’ve created relationships with clients in both Petoskey and on the island, and that’s also a part of the mission of the Community Foundation, is to work with community partnerships, so that fits in the nature of my practice.

Also, for about a decade I've been on the board for the Michigan Association of Municipal Attorneys and the Michigan Legal Defense Fund. We participate in amicus curiae briefs throughout Michigan on important issues that affect local government. We will try to do an amicus brief that may affect all municipalities. In that way, I've always been in tune with the complexities and pressures and problems that affect local communities.

Do you have anything else interesting to share about your family ties on the island?

I met my wife on Mackinac Island and we got married 32 years ago in St. Anne's Church with our reception at Fort Mackinac. This October, my daughter will be married in the same church. We've come full circle where my kids are getting more engaged up there. We're very involved with the church because our cottage is across the street. I was an altar boy there, got married there and now my kids are getting married there.

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