

# Joseph P. McGill, 2017–2018 Chair of the Representative Assembly

By Daniel Cortez

**A**t the age of 9, Joseph McGill, one of 11 children in a strong Irish-American family, decided to become a lawyer. This early decision was likely influenced by his eldest brother, Liam, who practices law in Portland, Oregon. It might also have been the influence of his father, a doctor; or his mother, the head of the McGill family of 13; or any of his other siblings. Whatever the reason or whoever the mentor, McGill became a lawyer.

McGill's embrace of mentorship is not just something he speaks of generally. His life and career have been guided by sage wisdom from those more experienced.

"The message was simple. They always told me you can be whatever you want to be," he recalled. "Just don't let anyone or anything get in the way of what you want to accomplish."

"I had the benefit of watching my older brothers and sisters striving to achieve success in their chosen professions. Now they look to me for counsel. In the long run, I hope to pass down the lessons I've learned to my three-year-old son, William."

McGill, 53, a principal at the firm Foley, Baron, Metzger, and Juip, PLLC, assumes the responsibility of chair of the State Bar of Michigan Representative Assembly this fall. He served as vice chair for the past year under outgoing chair Fred K. Herrmann.

Over the next year, McGill anticipates that the Representative Assembly will be involved in proposed changes to the Michigan Rules of Civil Discovery. As for policy issues, he expects to address delinquencies in payment of Bar dues. He also looks forward to chairing the Representative Assembly meeting in April 2018.

When he does assume the chairmanship, McGill hopes to share the lessons he



Joseph P. McGill

has learned from a host of considerate mentors he has encountered both personally and professionally. He would like to be an example for others to serve as mentors for young attorneys who aspire to leadership positions.

"I'm hoping to give back to the Representative Assembly and State Bar leadership

the same leadership skills I've learned after all these years of fantastic mentorship from a diverse group of skilled professionals."

McGill's career was coached by a number of accomplished professionals. Early in his professional life, he worked with Jeremiah Kenney, the managing partner of a large firm, whom he recalled as the go-to trial partner capable of commanding a case within weeks while leading a diverse group of professionals.

"Jerry didn't sweat the small stuff and gave me the opportunity to do a lot of challenging projects early in my career. He had a great sense of humor and a great respect for the law. He possessed a genuine sense of humility, but was also a master of the litigation and trial process. Working up a case with Jerry was a learning experience second to none."

Several years into his career, Jerry told McGill he was leaving for a new firm in a matter of days. McGill was losing the primary mentor who had guided him from the beginning of his legal career. He felt lost, but was thankful to have had such a wise mentor.



McGill opens lemonade stand "law business" at age 9.

Photo by Dr. Margaret Hepke

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"Even after leaving the firm, he would take the time to chat and offer advice on whatever the particular issue might be."

Turns out, just as one mentor left his life another would enter. Fred Hoops, a well-known estate planning lawyer, walked into McGill's office one day and suggested that he should consider pursuing an LLM in taxation. McGill took the advice and sought his LLM at Wayne State University. And who was the professor for his Estate Planning & Business courses? Hoops.

The two would meet at a Denny's parking lot in the wee hours of the morning and carpool to their 8 a.m. classes in Hoops's Mustang Cobra. During those long drives, McGill found that in Hoops he had not only a work colleague and professor, but also a mentor who would regularly offer him sound guidance.

"I went from a man with no country, so to speak, to working with Fred. He made you work hard, but he brought you along. That time we spent together was more about life lessons, whether it was dealing with clients or dealing with coworkers."

Working with Hoops exposed McGill to a variety of issues that required knowledge of several complex areas of the law.

"Fred was famous for saying that when a client hires an attorney, they are paying for the lawyer to be 'right,' meaning that it's the attorney's job to know the law and the facts. Only then should the lawyer advise the client. I've always tried to practice by this simple rule regardless of the size of project."

McGill was then invited to join what would become Foley, Baron, Metzger, and Juip in 2003, the same year he married his wife, Lauren, who is also an attorney. At his new firm, McGill worked with attorney Richard Baron on a number of environmental cases. Baron is a thought leader in the



Photo by Suzanne McGill-Anderson

Elizabeth "Betty" McGill, 92, the ultimate senior partner of Clan McGill.

area, with decades of experience litigating complex environmental issues across the nation. To McGill, after working on commercial litigation and estate and business planning matters, environmental law was a natural new challenge.

"Throughout my career, I have consistently tried to develop my skills in new areas of the law," he said. "Having been blessed with a lot of challenging work and great mentors, I have a very broad-based practice experience that matches up well with my academic background."

"Working with Rich for the past 15 years has completely transformed my practice. I now approach problem solving from a multidisciplinary perspective, always keeping the client's needs in mind."

After learning from so many mentors, McGill began to seek out leadership opportunities in a number of professional networking organizations.

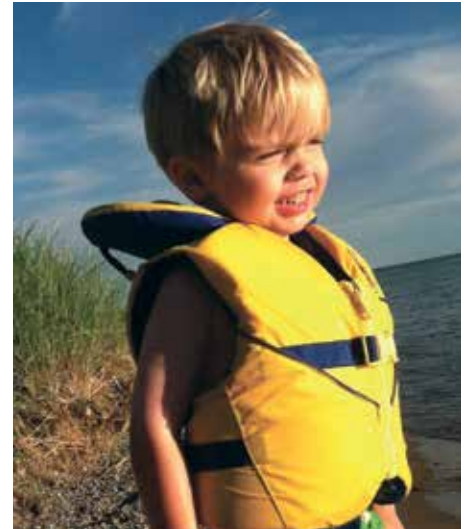


Photo by Joseph McGill

McGill's son William Henry, contemplating adventure on the shores of Lake Huron.

"Over the last 10–12 years I've stepped outside the law firm setting to do more networking. It adds a whole new dimension to the practice of law. You get to know judges, top lawyers, and business leaders in the community."

McGill would like to assist others in expanding their horizons through involvement with groups like the Representative Assembly. As he has become more experienced, he finds himself taking younger lawyers under his wing, serving as the mentor instead of the mentee.

"It's challenging, and I'm trying to hone my leadership skills. I've been a good follower and now I want to be a good leader. The Representative Assembly has provided a great platform for achieving that goal." ■

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