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Gary McInerney spends much of his time making West Michigan a better place to live, having worked with nearly 30 organizations during his time here.

McInerney Keeps Trying

By David Czurak

GRAND RAPIDS — His biggest career break came early, when he was just two years removed from Notre Dame law school. He had the opportunity then to form a firm and litigate some pretty important cases at an age when most fledgling attorneys barely leave the office's law library.

But Gary McInerney said that isn't what he considers to be his biggest achievement. In fact, that triumph has little to do with his career and almost nothing to do with the law.

"It is raising my four kids. I spent a lot of time with them and was very invested in raising my kids," he said of Ryan, Patrick, Kevin and Molly, who range in age from 27 to 18.

"They've all turned out good, so far," he said with a hearty laugh.

And taking a roll call makes his point. Ryan is a partner in a business-consulting firm called the McKenzie Group. Patrick is a full-time ski instructor in Vail, Colo., a ski coach, and on his way to law school. Kevin and Molly are both enrolled in college.

As for McInerney, he began his legal career at the top locally with Varnum, Riddering, Schmidt & Howlett, but left two years later to start Murphy, Neff,

BRIEFLY

Name: Gary McInerney
Company: McInerney Law Offices
Title: Owner
Age: 56
Birthplace: Grand Rapids
Residence: Grand Haven, temporarily
Family: Wife, Linda; children, Ryan, Patrick, Kevin and Molly
Business/Community Organizations: Convention & Arena Authority board member; president of American Board of Trial Advocates of Michigan; board member of Blue Cross Blue Shield of West Michigan
Biggest Career Break: Forming a law firm just two years after graduating from law school.

Burns & McInerney.

"It was fun," he said.

McInerney, a likable, low-key guy, celebrated his 30th anniversary as a litigator this year and over the course of his successful career has made arguments in almost every type of case imaginable.

"I've tried just about every kind of case, from anti-trust to capital punishment cases to sophisticated civil cases. Just about everything," he said.

"I've been blessed with some fabulous
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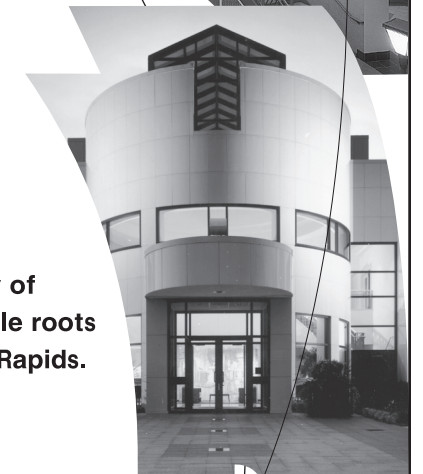


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McInerney

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verdicts and settlements, and I've been very lucky in some criminal cases."

McInerney said that for as long as he could remember, he always wanted to be an attorney. He wasn't sure *why* he wanted to do that, but, at a fairly young age, he was certain about what he wanted to do.

"I don't know. I had three brothers and all four of us became lawyers. So it must have been something in the water," he said with an even heartier laugh.

There was one male, though, in the McInerney household who wasn't a lawyer. James McInerney, Gary's father, owned and operated McInerney Spring & Wire Co. At one time, McInerney's, as it was called, was one of Grand Rapids' largest employers. It was also one of the first factories to hire women. Many worked there, especially during World War II.

"They made parachutes then. I'll tell you that I run into one person a month that worked there, or said their mother worked there," he said.

Much of what McInerney does today at McInerney Law Offices is on the civil side, and he said he draws a lot of personal fulfillment from his work. His focus today is on representing people who have been catastrophically injured.

"There is a lot of satisfaction in being able to provide a child that may be a quadriplegic with the funds to assist him or her in meeting his or her greatest potential, which by most measures may be very limited but to that family is very significant," he said.

In contrast, what McInerney doesn't like is part of the profession, namely litigation, that has been kicked around by too many people and become too much of a political football.

"Whether it's President Bush or the guy sitting on the bar stool here, it's easy to bash lawyers and it's easy to criticize runaway verdicts like the McDonald's coffee case. But the fact of the matter is, most practicing trial attorneys have a very difficult job and do a very significant service for people who have been injured," he said.

"But it's a fact of life today and it makes it very difficult to try a lawsuit in Kent County, where, first of all, there is a very conservative bend, anyway. And then you have to stand in front of a jury and know that these people have been watching TV for the last 12 months and listening to President Bush talk about trial lawyers, malpractice, how we can keep our doctors, and those kind of things. It's a difficult climate."

McInerney has been active in the community for a long time, having worked with nearly 30 organizations during his years here. He even ran as a Democrat for Congress in 1984 and was Democratic chairman of the Fifth Congressional District from 1984 to 1986.

But more recently, Gov. Jennifer Granholm appointed him last year to the Convention and Arena Authority, the seven-member panel that oversees operations of DeVos Place and Van Andel Arena. McInerney volunteered to find new funding sources to cover the cost of capital improvements that will be necessary to keep both buildings in top shape.

"This board is responsible to protect those community assets and there are challenges. One of the challenges is going to be to provide funds down the road and not go back to the public for renovations of things that are going to come up. We're wrestling with that now.

"They are top-notch people in the community," he said of the board members. "They are easy to work with and dedicat-

"I'd like to be able to further specialize my trial practice, and have more time to be involved with community activities, like the CAA."

ed, and they do it out of their sense of responsibility to the community."

McInerney also has a seat at the board of directors table for Blue Cross Blue Shield of West Michigan and is president of the American Board of Trial Advocates for Michigan.

"It's a very special group of trial attor-

neys that have accomplished certain professional goals, like trying at least 30 trials to conclusion. It's made up of both sides of the bar, both plaintiffs and defense," he said.

The McInerneys recently sold their East Grand Rapids home and are living in Grand Haven until they decide whether

they want to buy or build a new house. Gary is married to Linda, now retired from the federal court system, and when he isn't working they spend as much time together as possible. They visit the kids, who are spread out across the country, whenever time allows. He also plays golf and skis the white slopes, but he recently sold his boat and hung up his captain's cap.

"I'm in a downsizing mode now," he said.

Even so, McInerney isn't anywhere near the point of packing it in and heading to Tahiti.

"I'd like to be able to further specialize my trial practice," he said, "and have more time to be involved with community activities, like the CAA." **BJ**

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