

Matt McNichols

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Hello, I am Matt McNichols and I am proud to come from a family with deep ties to the Great Lakes area as well as ties to the Great Lakes & Midwest freight and transportation industries. Going back a couple of generations my ancestors on my mom's side of the family immigrated from Norway to the Suttons Bay, Michigan area and were involved in the logging community. My great grandfather was a photographer following his return to the area after serving in World War 1. His photos of the community from the early 1920's still hang on the walls of the Leelanau Historical Society Museum. My grandparents owned a cabin near the Grand Traverse Lighthouse and it was my grandmother's art work that first inspired my interest in Great Lakes freighters and in the Edmund Fitzgerald. My grandmother who was a very talented artist had a picture she drew of the Lake Michigan shoreline and in the distance is a great lakes freight ship with the bridge in the front of the boat, this drawing hung in the living room of the cabin for many years.



On my dad's side of the family my great grandfather immigrated from Ireland to Chicago and was able to get a job conducting trains with the Chicago and Northwestern rail line carrying freight such as taconite pellets, the same cargo the Edmund Fitzgerald was carrying, across the Midwest. During his time as a conductor my great grandfather was involved in assessing freight train accidents and helping to shape future transportation policies to help make freight in the Midwest a safer industry for all whom make their living supporting it.

Thanks to my parents, swimming has been a major part in shaping my life. My mom & dad met in collage swimming for Iowa State University, growing up we lived at the pool year-round spending family time together at the local YMCA, high school and neighborhood pools. My sisters & I began swimming on a neighborhood summer team when we were about 10 years old and continued to get more involved in the sport starting year around swimming and eventually swimming in high school. In college I was fortunate for the opportunity to swim for Michigan State University. My choice to attend Michigan State was heavily influenced by the summers I spent at my grandparents' cabin. At Michigan State my interest in the Great Lakes region grew significantly. I had several opportunities to explore the coasts surrounding the state and developed an appreciation for the impact that great lakes shipping had on the history of the economic development of the state and on the lives of the families that made the industry work.

When I found out about this event that merged Greatlakes's history and swimming together, I knew immediately I needed to be a part of it. My first call was to one of my best friends and the single greatest swimmer I know, my sister Kelly. Growing-up swimming especially played a critical part in developing the strong brother / sister relationship that Kelly & I still enjoy to this day. Kelly & I were immediately drawn to taking on the longest leg of the relay, stage 6, the Lake Huron crossing. We're looking forward to experiencing the event and to being a part of memorializing those lost on the Edmund Fitzgerald 50 years ago next Fall.