

Meet 'ANGEL' Attorney Darrell Clay

THIS WHITE-COLLAR DEFENSE ATTORNEY AT WALTER & HAVERFIELD IS FLYING HIGH AS AN ANGEL FLIGHT VOLUNTEER PILOT.

By Joe Jancsurak

His smile. That's what Walter & Haverfield attorney and flying enthusiast Darrell Clay remembers most about the boy he flew from Youngstown to Harrisburg, Pa., as the first leg of a two-part journey to a New Jersey hospital. Some might say the 9-year-old's grin that day went from ear to ear, but that would be only half true. For underneath the knit cap he wore on that cold February day last year, Lawrence Dunmire had no left ear -- at least not the exterior -- for he suffered from Grade III microtia. The congenital deformity left Lawrence with only a small peanut vestige structure and no external ear canal and ear drum. But his smile expressed the joy he felt for his first small-plane flight and the reconstructive surgery that awaited him.

To Lawrence and the many other children and adults who have received medical transport from the 39-year-old Old Brooklyn resident and father of one -- 10-year-old William -- Clay is their "angel pilot." The moniker is both sentimental and true as Clay happens to be one of the 1,530 registered volunteer pilots for the Angel Flight Mid-Atlantic (AFMA), one of six regional, nonprofit Angel Flight chapters. AFMA provides medical transport to ensure no patient in need is denied access to distant specialized medical treatments.

"For many years as a child, I had a significant buildup of scar tissue on my nose, the result of a childhood accident," explains Clay. "I eventually had surgery to remove the buildup, and that helped bring an end to the cruel things that other kids used to say to me. Helping Lawrence was, in many ways, an opportunity to revisit some of my experiences as a child, I could imagine the horrible things that might have been said to him."

The Angel Flight network provides free flights to medi-

cal-care facilities to patients in need of financial assistance and in many cases, "a second chance at life," says Mary Jane Sablan, missions director for AFMA, headquartered in Virginia Beach, Va. Sablan considers the volunteer pilots such as Clay to be "heroes to those in need."

When Clay isn't transporting the sick, he can be found



Walter & Haverfield attorney Darrell Clay volunteers his time and resources to Angel Flight Mid-Atlantic.

Off The Clock

seeking justice for his clients as a partner of Cleveland law firm Walter & Haverfield LLP. Clay's life as a lawyer and pilot are the direct result of his childhood in Clearwater, Fla., when his heroes included a fictional defense attorney Perry Mason and real-life astronaut Neil Armstrong -- "How can you not admire the first human being ever to set foot on something other than planet Earth?" Clay asks rhetorically.

Like the Perry Mason legal character in movies, books and television, Clay is diligent in defending his clients, though they happen to be small-business owners and white-collar clients in need of criminal defense, rather than murder suspects in need of a scripted miracle.

And like his other childhood heroes, Clay has a passion for flying, though he remembers as a young boy having to put aside aspirations of space flight because of his nearsightedness. "Glasses are incompatible with becoming a test pilot, which is a principle path for persons wanting to become a pilot of the space shuttle," Clay explains. "It turns out that there are now civilian paths to becoming an astronaut such as being a mission specialist. But rarely do you learn all of these things as a kid trying to figure out what to make of your life."

So Clay focused on pursuing his Perry Mason-like dreams, opting for law school -- Tulane University, 1994, *magna cum laude* -- instead of the NASA training program.

Licensed to practice in Louisiana where he began his career with the now defunct Monroe & Lehmann, and Ohio where he joined Walter & Haverfield in 1997, it wasn't long before Clay achieved his other childhood dream, though in a slightly different form. Instead of becoming an astronaut after establishing himself as a lawyer, Clay became a licensed pilot in 2002. Today, along with friend, fellow Angel Flight pilot and former Walter & Haverfield colleague Mark Savage (now with Squire, Sanders & Dempsey), Clay owns a 1979 Piper Arrow that he uses for his Angel Flights.

Clay says it was his mom, Clementine, and events surrounding her 60-day bout with aggressive brain cancer, which took her life in 2003, that inspired him to become an Angel Flight pilot. "I remember so many people volunteering their time to take my mom back and forth for treatments," says Clay. "I was working here (in Cleveland) and my mom was living in Florida. I've tried to honor my mom's memory through my service as an Angel Flight pilot."

Since becoming an Angel Flight pilot in 2005, Clay says he flies about five to 10 flights a year. As for expenses associated with his Angel Flight trips, Clay takes care of his own costs, as do all Angel Flight pilots. Last year he flew six flights accounting for thousands of dollars in expenses for fuel, landing fees, etc. And that doesn't even include the plane tickets he bought during the July 4th weekend last summer for a married couple whom he was unable to fly due to bad weather.

"The couple was traveling to John Hopkins in Balti-

more where the woman was scheduled to donate one of her kidneys to her husband," explains Clay. "Thunderstorms throughout the weekend made it impossible for us to coordinate the flight. Its always up to the pilots to make their own decisions when it comes to flying or not flying. When it comes to such matters, pilots like to say, 'It's better to be on the ground wishing you were in the air than it is being in the air wishing you were on the ground.' That's *hangar* wisdom."

But what about the scheduled kidney transplant? "When the other pilot and I canceled the flights, I purchased tickets for the couple on a commercial airliner. I wanted that donation to take place. If that woman was willing to give of her body, I was willing to give of my wallet." ✈

Angel Flight Facts

HISTORY: In 1972, Ed Boyer began organized charitable medical air transportation in northern Virginia under an earlier name, Washington Aviation Ministry. The name change to Angel Flight occurred in the mid-1980s, and in 1995 it became Angel Flight Mid-Atlantic (AFMA) as other regions were added, including Northeast Ohio. Angel Flight America in Addison, Texas, was established in 1999. The Angel Flight America national network is a collaborative "bottom-up" structure. Member organizations (regions) hold seats on the AFA Board and the officer positions rotate annually among the member organizations. Each member organization has its own full-time staff and autonomous board of directors. The mission and purpose of all members is focused on "giving hope wings" to children and adults in need by leveraging aviation resources.

MISSION: To ensure that no patient in need is denied access to distant specialized medical evaluation, diagnosis, treatment or rehabilitation for lack of a means of long-distance medical air transportation.

Patients Served
by AFMA in 2006 : 10,000

Patients Served
by All Regions in 2006 : 25,000

Number of AFMA Pilots : 1,530

Number of Pilots
for All Regions : 7,561

Mission Flights
for AFMA in 2006 : 3,304

Mission Flights
for All Regions in 2006 : 25,722