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Alumnus finds politics smooth sailing

By **Liz Lent**, OU writer

From the deck of a ship trapped in Arctic ice, surrounded by towering icebergs and bone-chilling winds, OU graduate John Jamian saw something that astounded him: a lone Inuit man speeding past him on a snowmobile across the icy tundra. It was a study in contrasts that has stayed with Jamian, a man who has combined his own seemingly contrary loves – ships and politics – into one flourishing career.

This past May, Jamian was appointed by President George W. Bush to serve as deputy administrator for the United States Department of Transportation's Maritime Administration.

"I'm a pretty lucky man," Jamian says.

In his new role, Jamian will assist in leading the operations of the 850-person agency, which includes the United States Merchant Marine Academy, and will oversee issues concerning the Great Lakes, inland waterways such as the Mississippi River, deepwater ports and segments of the Marine Transportation System initiative.

A sailor since the age of 19, Jamian's passion for water and ships has taken him on voyages to the Arctic and across the Atlantic as a passenger on a cargo ship bound for Belgium. The 700-foot-long ship crossed paths with the terrifying storm portrayed in the 1999 film, "The Perfect Storm," and was tossed about "like a toy" by the wind and waves.

Back on land, Jamian finds the same sort of excitement in the political arena. His name will be familiar to Michigan voters who elected him to three terms as state representative serving the 65th district, a region that includes Oakland University.

The former sociology major entered politics after several years of running a successful medical supply company with his brother, a fellow OU graduate. The experience piqued his interest in health-care issues.

"I saw problems and I wanted to fix some of the components of the medical system," Jamian said. And, he did just that as a state representative, chairing the Healthy Policy Committee and writing the Michigan Patient Rights Bill, only the second one in the country at that time.

Following his departure from state government, Jamian served as executive director of the Detroit Wayne County Port Authority and helped organize Detroit's Tall Ships event, celebrating the city's tri-centennial in 2001. Most recently, he headed the Armenian Assembly of America, the largest Washington-based, nationwide organization dedicated to promoting public understanding of Armenian issues in America.

Through the years, it's been Jamian's love of working with people that's guided him. As an OU student, "I was very involved," he said. "I was a commuter but I spent a lot of extra hours on campus." The first elected office he ever held was as president of the OU Ski Club.

"My years at Oakland were wonderful," he said. "The academics were not easy and I received a great education there. I loved the student-to-faculty ratio and the fact that I was taught by professors, not graduate students."

In the coming months, Jamian will put his people skills to work as he brings maritime issues to the legislative forefront. Most people fail to realize how many of our every day necessities are brought to U.S. shores and sent abroad by merchant sea vessels, Jamian said. The U.S. relies heavily on the maritime industry in times of war as well. During Operation Iraqi Freedom, the administration's ready-reserve fleet shipped humvees, tanks and troops to Iraq.

"When people see ships, I don't think they realize how much what those ships are carrying affect their lives," Jamian said.

Jamian also will focus on environmental concerns. With an aging maritime fleet, a significant number of older vessels will be taken out of service in coming years.

"We're very mindful of the environment," he said. "We have a lot of aging vessels that we now have to dismantle very carefully. We don't want to do anything to damage the waters." The Maritime Administration will be working cooperatively with the

Environmental Protection Agency to safeguard all aspects of that venture.

Jamian hopes his tenure with the Maritime Administration is a long one – he will remain in office as long as Bush is president.

When Jamian's term ends, however, he intends to head back to Michigan where his wife and two children, including OU graduate Michelle, still live. Despite leaving Washington, D.C., behind, his career in public life will be far from over. "I plan to have a lot to do with Michigan politics in the future."

SUMMARY

OU graduate John Jamian recently was appointed by President George W. Bush to serve as deputy administrator for the U.S. Department of Transportation's Maritime Administration. In his new role, Jamian will assist in leading the operations of the 850-person agency. His name will be familiar to Michigan voters who elected him to three terms as state representative serving the 65th district, a region that includes Oakland University.

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