

Interview

Fighting for Those Who Cannot Fight for Themselves

An Interview with Christian D. Searcy,
President and Chief Executive Officer, Searcy Denney Scarola Barnhart & Shipley, PA



Christian D. Searcy,

EDITORS' NOTE For over 30 years, Christian Searcy has litigated cases primarily involving catastrophic injury and death in venues throughout Florida, as well as other states. In 2006, he was one of only two lawyers in the country to receive the War Horse Award from the Southern Trial Lawyers Association. In 2005, the Florida Justice Association, formerly known as the Academy of Florida Trial Lawyers, honored Searcy with its Perry Nichols Award. Searcy is President of the prestigious International Academy of Trial Lawyers; a member of the Inner Circle of Advocates; a diplomate of the American Association for Justice; and a member of the International Society of Barristers. He is Board Certified in Civil Litigation by the National Board of Legal Specialty Certification, formerly known as the National Board of Trial Advocacy, and by The Florida Bar Association. Searcy earned a B.A. with distinction from the University of Virginia, and received his Juris Doctor from Stetson University College of Law.

FIRM BRIEF Searcy Denney Scarola Barnhart & Shipley, PA (www.searcyllaw.com) is a nationally recognized trial law firm committed to protecting and vindicating the rights of people injured through negligence, improper conduct, deceit, and abuse of power. The firm has represented clients in courtrooms throughout Florida and across the nation for more than 30 years.

How do you define Searcy Denney's focus?

We're a firm that represents people who have sustained a catastrophic loss, whether it's physical or financial. We have the skill, expertise, and wherewithal to take on the most difficult cases against the most difficult defendants where the amount in controversy is sufficiently substantial to justify it.

What are the key characteristics that make a good trial lawyer?

When it comes to being a successful trial lawyer, many are called and few are chosen.

It requires an individual who can and will go into the arena to fight for those who cannot fight for themselves, and who performs best under conditions of great stress. At least for those who work on a contingency fee basis where, if you don't win, you don't get paid, it requires one who can undertake and manage great risk; who can face the fear of failure, embarrassment, and humiliation, and not allow his or her behavior to be altered by that; and who has courage, belief, and confidence in one's self and one's abilities. Once you're in the trial and things are proceeding, you don't have time to research something or call a meeting and get a consensus of opinion – you have to react instantaneously to whatever unexpected events come up.

You also need tremendous stamina and endurance to be well prepared to answer the bell when it rings, regardless of the hours and demands that are put upon you. There will be a time when that trial starts and you have to be ready, and there is not enough time in the day so you're going to have to stay up all night.

And there has to be the commitment to the representation of your client and the rule of law to the extent where, at some point you say, I'm putting this trial, this client, and the principles involved ahead of my own well-being and life.

There is much talk today about the explosion of litigation and the perception that goes with it. Does it frustrate you and is it difficult to get the message out about the critical role that those who are leading in this industry play?

Is it frustrating? Yes. Is it important politically? Yes. Does it have an effect on a litigant getting a fair trial? Not always, but many times. And when people are fighting

over something they were unable to agree upon, half of everybody you deal with is going to hate you because they're on the other side.

However, when you do what you do well, you might not be someone's favorite person, but they will respect you.

There are many vested interests that see themselves as traditional defendants or targets of our justice system who have attempted to manipulate the odds by public relations campaigns to demean individuals or companies who bring lawsuits, and to demean lawyers who represent individuals and companies who bring lawsuits.

There will be some individuals and companies who bring lawsuits that shouldn't have, but the majority of litigation that goes on is meritorious, where legitimate rights are being disputed. The idea of the tort system being some kind of illegitimate lotto didn't happen by accident – that is a propaganda machine upon which hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent.

It would be better for the citizens if that were not the case. Where courtrooms work the best is where you have a jury that is not going to come in with a biased view, but is going to listen to the facts of the case, listen to the instructions on the law, and decide the case on the facts and law.

Is it tough to find great talent today? How have you built your team?

There are a lot of people that would like to be great litigators. You can have a person with all the equipment but, when they get in the courtroom, can't do it. And you can't tell which ones are going to succeed and which aren't until they have been subjected to trial by fire.

Most of our hires for the firm are those that have been practicing for five years or so, where they have had time to show that they can find their way around a courtroom, but haven't been practicing so long as to have developed too many bad habits.

You've also focused, as a firm, on the community and giving back. How critical is that to the culture of the firm?

The community we live in is only going to be as good as we help to make it. We enjoy being a part of the system that involves justice and helping do good things in that community to the extent we can do it. ●