



THE  
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# Florida Trend

## FLORIDA'S MOST FEARED LAWYERS

When they say  
'See you in court,'  
these guys aren't  
bluffing.

# Making Personal Connections

**HIS OFFICE IS DECORATED WITH SCENES OF BATTLE AND A SWORD FROM THE CRUSADES, BUT HIS COURTROOM STYLE IS FAR FROM COMBATIVE.**

**C**hristian Searcy's first big break was his own inexperience. Only four years out of law school, he was approached by Bob Montgomery with a case: A young man had lost his legs to a passing train after he ended up on the tracks at 3 a.m. following a night of drinking. Just about every decent trial lawyer in south Florida had already passed on it. "It's a dog, but it's yours if you want it," Montgomery told him.

With a few more years of experience, Searcy probably would have smelled a dog, too. Instead, he pulled the accident report, and was intrigued that an engineer had reported seeing something on the tracks. He did some more research and discovered the engine's spotlight threw a beam of light 800 feet down the tracks. The speed limit was 25 miles per hour — slow enough, Searcy calculated, for the train to stop in 800 feet. If the train wasn't speeding, the accident could have been avoided.

Further review of the medical records revealed a bump on the back of the victim's head not related to the accident. And his wallet, stuffed with bills from a just-cashed paycheck, was nowhere to be found. What had looked like an accident induced by alcohol and stupidity was starting to look like a bankable tragedy — a twice-victimized young man, mugged, then run down by a careless engineer. The railroad settled for \$1 million, making Searcy, 30 at the

time, the youngest lawyer in the U.S. to obtain a million-dollar recovery.

Today Searcy is the senior lawyer at the law firm built by Montgomery, who left in 1989 after a bitter dispute over money and management. Though Searcy says Montgomery was both his mentor and his closest friend, the two have never reconciled.

The meticulous research that earned him his first victory is still a trademark. A one-time college boxing champion, he says a good courtroom battle is his "fix."

Searcy has decorated his office with scenes of battle and a sword from the Crusades, but his courtroom style is far from combative. His voice, a



## CHRISTIAN SEARCY

**Age:** 51

**Law School:** Stetson University, 1973

**Law Firm:** Searcy, Denney, Scarola, Barnhart & Shipley, 19 lawyers

**Law Office:** West Palm Beach

**Biggest Verdict:** \$50 million — wrongful death, CSX Transportation, 1997

soft Virginia drawl, is on occasion accompanied by tears. He

comes by them honestly, he says, because of a strong personal connection to the kind of tragedies he's hired to present. When he was 13, he was in a car accident that killed his 6-year-old brother. And a delivery-room mistake 25 years ago left his son permanently brain-damaged.

Both events, he says, guided his choice of specialty, though he is also the son of a plaintiffs lawyer. "I think one of the reasons I have the success that I have is a very real sense of what (victims) are going through." □