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Personal Tragedy Begets a Different Kind of Law Firm

At Searcy Denney Scarola Barnhart & Shipley, lawyers draw on their own life experiences to better represent injured clients.

A SPECIAL ADVERTISING SUPPLEMENT TO THE MIAMI HERALD
AND THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



LEFT TO RIGHT, STANDING
Chris Speed, Jack Hill,
Jack Scarola, Brian Denney,
Chris Searcy, Greg Barnhart,
Cal Warriner, Ed Ricci,
William Norton, John Shipley,
Darryl Lewis, Mariano Garcia

LEFT TO RIGHT, SEATED
Sia Baker-Barnes, Brenda Fulmer,
James Gustafson, Karen Terry

SEARCY DENNEY SCAROLA BARNHART

With 16 of its 31 attorneys listed in the 2016 edition of *The Best Lawyers in America*, Searcy Denney Scarola Barnhart & Shipley boasts more *Best Lawyers* than any other plaintiffs' personal injury/wrongful death law firm in Florida.

It should come as no surprise, then, that the firm—which also focuses on mass tort claims, commercial litigation, and tobacco cases—has achieved more than \$4.2 billion in results over the last 36 years, including a 2005 \$1.58 billion verdict against Morgan Stanley on behalf of financier Ronald Perelman (which,



PHOTO BY LARRY GATZ

& SHIPLEY, P.A.

though overturned on appeal, was at the time the largest verdict in the country for an individual plaintiff).

“We have many great attorneys at this firm, not just one or two; and the lawyers not yet in Best Lawyers are all working toward that goal,” notes Christian Searcy, the firm’s CEO.

Sia Baker-Barnes has a well-earned reputation for obtaining multimillion-dollar verdicts, and also works to make a difference through diversity and inclusion.

Greg Barnhart has 30 years of trial experience and some of the largest verdicts in the state against manufacturing companies, hospitals and corporations.

Brian Denney thrives in the courtroom, having tried cases throughout Florida for both plaintiffs and defendants, including medical malpractice, products liability and automobile negligence matters.

Brenda Fulmer, West Palm Beach’s 2016 Plaintiffs’ Mass Tort Litigation Lawyer of the Year, has assisted thousands of clients injured by defective drugs and medical devices, helping to spur improved patient safety, product recalls and changes in the law.

Mariano Garcia came to the United States not speaking a word of English and today serves as a voice for Latinos in the justice system.

James Gustafson makes Big Tobacco answer for its conduct in the courtroom, where, he notes, being right is more important than being powerful, and fairness trumps strength.

Jack Hill is a Yale graduate and former prosecutor who knows from experience how to try the most complex and difficult cases in any venue.

Darryl Lewis is a skilled and highly effective orator, known to stir emotions and spur jurors to action.

William Norton has obtained more than 50 verdicts or settlements in excess of \$1 million in medical negligence, product liability, and wrongful death cases.

Edward V. Ricci has tried every type of individual injury case, from products to premises liability. He exemplifies the firm’s next generation of trial attorneys.

Chris Searcy has become famous for achieving record verdicts in cases involving tragedies. He attributes this success to his empathy for his clients’ situations, having experienced tragedy in his own life.

Jack Scarola has handled hundreds of trials over his 43-year career; this year, he was honored in five of Best Lawyers’ categories and named as West Palm Beach’s Plaintiffs’ Medical Malpractice Lawyer of the Year.

John Shipley relishes the opportunity to practice at Searcy Denney, likening it to playing on a football team that wins the Super Bowl every year.

Christopher Speed, given his training and experience as a licensed pilot, advocates for victims of aviation negligence.

Karen Terry, by holding big businesses responsible for catastrophic injuries, has earned recognition in five of Best Lawyers’ categories, as well as the designation of West Palm Beach’s 2016 Plaintiffs’ Product Liability Litigation Lawyer of the Year.

C. Calvin Warriner filed the country’s first mass tort case in the landmark \$1.5 billion Stryker settlement and served on the negotiating team for the 4,000 injured victims.

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It has been 55 years since the car accident that claimed the life of Christian Searcy's then six-year-old brother, but time hasn't lessened the pain of that loss, or Searcy's ability to recall the tragedy in vivid detail.

"I was 12 years old and my family was driving home from the beach," he remembers. "Our route took us through a new housing development where nobody had put up stop signs, and, at an intersection, a car going 70 miles per hour broadsided us, sending our car spinning.

"When we finally came to a stop, I realized my younger brother, Henry, wasn't in the car, so I went looking for him, only to find him in the sand by a telephone pole, with a hole in the top of his forehead and his teeth all broken. I said his name and his eyes focused on me and he tried to sit up, but people had arrived on the scene and they pulled me away, and that was the last I saw of him."

The trauma of this loss would alter anyone's life, and it has had a particular effect on Searcy's legal career: as

"I realized early on that you can't learn everything from books, especially not how it feels to be the victim of a life-changing trauma."

CEO of Searcy Denney Scarola Barnhart & Shipley, he has drawn on his own life experience to better represent victims of personal injury and wrongful death.

"What I've found over my 42 years in practice is that professional detachment isn't all it's cracked up to be," Searcy says. "The success we've experienced as a firm, with more than \$4.2 billion in verdicts and settlements over the last 36 years, is very much due to the personal connections we've been able to build with our clients."

For Searcy, no case could have affected him more personally than the car accident he handled in 2001, where, in a tragedy mirroring his own, a family's six-year-old daughter was killed after an off-duty police officer broadsided their car at an unmarked intersection. Searcy obtained a \$256 million verdict in that case, and he credits this result to the bond he was able to form with the family, given their similar experiences.



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Searcy recognized similarities between the family's case and his own experience in the birth of his first son.

"I was 25 and in my first year of law practice when my son, who my wife and I were naming after my deceased brother Henry, suffered permanent brain damage from a high forceps delivery; so, given my familiarity with the subject, I could tell from listening to the parents that their child had suffered something similar, and that the records in the case had been falsified."

Searcy was able to obtain a verdict of more than \$63 million for the parents, and he is quick to point out that by drawing on their personal connections to a case, other lawyers at the firm have similarly achieved notable results.

"To name just a few, James Gustafson, one of our go-to lawyers for cases against Big Tobacco, still feels the sting of his father's death from lung cancer after a lifetime of smoking. My colleague Greg Barnhart's father languished in a hospital and died a lingering, painful death. My partner John Shipley and his wife suffered the heartbreak of a newborn who lived only 10 days. Mass torts attorney Brenda Fulmer's family fled a terrifying tornado when she was a child. And personal injury lawyer Sia Baker-Barnes had a house burn to the ground.

"It's a cliché, but when we talk to clients who have been physically and emotionally devastated by a tragic event, we've been there, and our empathy for their circumstances has a tremendous impact on the caliber of our representation—it's why we're so passionate about obtaining justice for them." 📌

"I realized early on that you can't learn everything from books, especially not how it feels to be the victim of a life-changing trauma," Searcy says. "So when I speak with a woman heartbroken by the loss of her husband in a catastrophic auto accident, or a family struggling to care for a child damaged at birth by medical malpractice, their stories tap into my own reservoir of tragedy, and I become even more motivated to succeed on their behalf."

Searcy recalls how, in 2004, he represented the family of a child who had suffered a severe brain injury at birth after the doctor performed a high-forceps delivery, a risky procedure no longer used in modern obstetrics practice. Although hospital records failed to mention the procedure's use,