

EXEC ACCESS

In Bergen, everyone knows his name

Lawyer made a mark for himself early

By **JOAN VERDON**
STAFF WRITER

Pick an institution, politician or business leader in Bergen County and the odds are good John Schepisi has a connection to them.

Schepisi, founder of the Schepisi & McLaughlin firm in Englewood Cliffs, has been Bergen County Republican chairman, served on the Board of Governors of Hackensack University Medical Center, and is an attorney for the trustees of Bergen Community College.

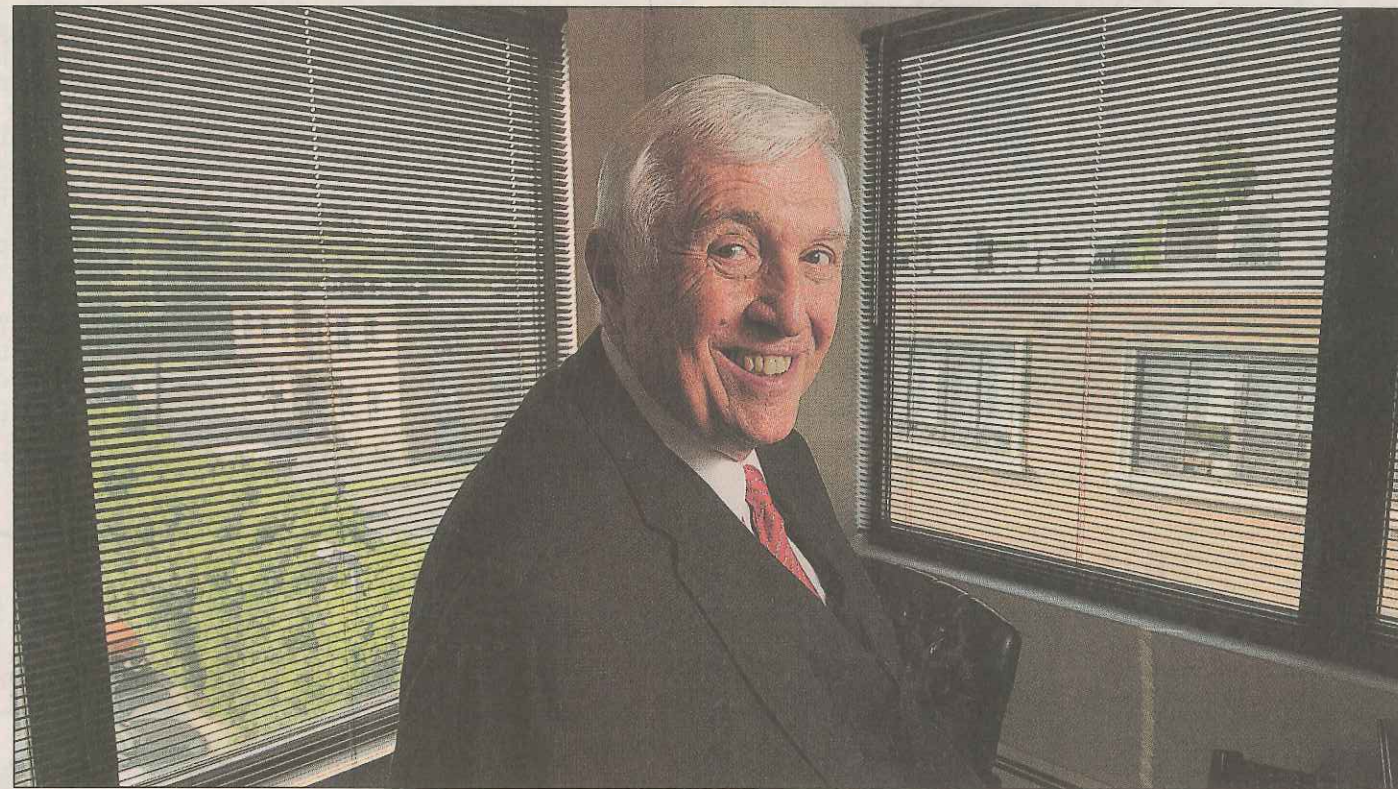
He has owned two restaurants, and spent 11 years winning a landmark \$30.6 million settlement for owners of condominiums damaged in two 1995 hurricanes in St. Maarten, where he owned three apartments, and still vacations. He's been involved in legal issues ranging from a condo association's right to evict a Chihuahua to the rights of property owners versus the state in a plan to remake the Little Ferry traffic circle.

Schepisi, 66, lives in Saddle River and is the father of Holly, an attorney, Mark, a real estate entrepreneur, and Rory, a former reality TV star and restaurateur, and a TV chef in Texas.

One of Schepisi's hobbies is fishing for striped bass on his 48-foot sport fishing boat, Late Meeting. "By attending late meetings is how I could afford that boat," he says. (Interview edited and condensed.)

Q. You are the ultimate connected Bergen County guy. How did that happen?

I was a workaholic. I still am a workaholic. Before the kids were born I worked seven days a week. After the kids were born, from Friday night until Sunday night was for the kids, but the rest of the week I was out working. I was at



DAVID BERGELAND/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

John Schepisi, founder and president of Schepisi & McLaughlin, at his offices in Englewood Cliffs.

political affairs. I was in court. I knew everybody. I showed my face and people liked me. I developed a clientele based upon my adversaries retaining me after I handled a case against them.

Q. Speaking of which, you were the Republican county chairman but you've had a lot of Democrats as clients.

When I was the Republican county chairman, the Democratic county chairman and I both sat on the board of directors of a bank. Yes, politically we were separate and apart, but socially we were friendly. To this day, I can say half of my friends are Democrats and half of my friends are Republicans. I have friends on both sides of the aisle. And it pays off. One of my very close friends was Steve Moses, who was Mr. Democrat from New Jersey. Joe Parisi was another close friend before he passed. Gerry Calabrese is a close friend. And my best friends are the Creamer fami-

ly [of construction company J. Fletcher Creamer & Son]. And you couldn't ask for anyone more Republican than the Creamers.

Q. How did you get to know them?

I was a young attorney working for Bill Breslin. Bill was the borough attorney and I used to always be in Fort Lee covering meetings and Fletch Creamer's grandfather – the grandfather of the current Fletch Creamer – was a politician in Fort Lee at that time and he took a liking to me. They had a small construction company and he went to his son and said, 'Why don't you try using the kid' – namely me – 'as your attorney on this one case?' I represented J. Fletcher Creamer & Son on that one case, won it hands down, and from that day on started representing them.

Q. Looking at past Record stories, you've been all over the place in terms of cases. In one you're rep-

resenting someone who lost their job, in another you're representing the person who fired the guy. In another case you're representing a condo association that wants to evict a Chihuahua, in another case you're representing someone who wants to build a 100-unit condo building.

I've been blessed with the ability to wear different hats and think a little bit out of the box and I credit that to one thing – Stevens Institute of Technology. I learned how to analyze problems. Most lawyers can say, 'This is what your problem is.' But I've been able to say, 'I came up with a solution. And if that one doesn't work for you, here's another one.'

Q. Do you still try the small cases?

I try to stay away from the small cases. That's why we have seven lawyers here. But I'm a micro manager. There's not a case in the office that I don't know about. I try to oversee everybody. I read every-

one's e-mail. When I'm not in the office, I've got an iPhone, a BlackBerry, and a regular cellphone. And now I have the iPad, so I'm checking everything. I'm constantly seeing everybody's e-mail, so if I see an attorney's getting himself into a problem on a case, I'll immediately get on the phone or send him or her an e-mail and say this is what I think you have to do to correct the problem.

Q. What should a client come to you for? What's your prime expertise?

The prime thing I do is if you have a problem, I'll either solve it for you, tell you how to solve it, or steer you to the right person. ... I'm one of the few guys that can take a piece of vacant land, negotiate the deal, handle the closing, go ahead and do all the condominium documents if you're converting it, get it approved, and then handle the litigation when you get sued by the condominium association later, be-

John Schepisi

Founder, president,
Schepisi & McLaughlin, P.A.

■ **His business:** Head a general practice law firm with offices in Englewood Cliffs and New York City. The firm handles cases ranging from work for corporate clients including CNBC and North Jersey Community Bank, and real estate transactions, to prenuptial agreements and other family law matters.

■ **His background:** He grew up in Fort Lee and graduated from Fort Lee High School in 1961 at age 16. He earned a bachelor's degree in engineering with a specialty in polymer science at Stevens Institute of Technology in 1965, before switching to the study of law. He graduated from St. John's Law School in 1968. He has been Bergen County Republican chairman, a member of the executive board of governors of Hackensack University Medical Center, and president of the Bergen County Bar Association. He is on the board of trustees of Stevens Institute and is the attorney for the board of trustees at Bergen Community College.

cause I've had the experience of doing all of those in my career.

Q. It seems like you know so many people, you've been involved in so many things, that any case you're involved with there would be a conflict of interest.

It's not a conflict of interest when you know people. Or been involved in a business venture, or been on different sides of the table and we know each other. As long as there's no conflict of interest on the issue, I'm an advocate. I'm advocating your case.

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