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PAPERS CHASE: Irving Botwinick has a reputation for being able to find and serve legal papers on the hard to find.

A process server's tales are legendary

By BERNARD BARD

Like the Royal Canadian Mounties, Irving Botwinick always gets his man.

He's the king of process-servers. He once scrubbed up as a surgeon to serve a doctor in the operating room. He sat next to a celebrity at a society dinner to serve him after dessert. He's climbed fire escapes, engaged in cab chases.

Botwinick has a staff of 20 like-minded fanatics to assist him at Serving By Irving Inc., 233 Broadway.

One served a man involved in a divorce action on a nude beach. He recognized him by a snake tattooed on his thigh. The ID was supplied by his estranged wife.

A female operative went through a gynecological exam so she could serve an obstetrician in a malpractice case.

One of Irving's best gets around in a wheelchair because of a childhood injury. His code name is "wheels." He does great. Irving says, because "if a guy rolls up in a wheelchair you feel sorry for him."

"Wheels" got a man to come to the door by telling him he just won a Publishers Clearing House sweepstakes. He served a doctor at NYU Medical Center by asking for help in filling in his application to medical school.

"We don't wait around for a response," says Irving.

They can get nasty. One of Irving's servers was chased by a man with a butcher knife. Irving was surrounded by nine musclemen when he served divorce papers on a Westchester mob figure. One enraged defendant jumped up and down on the hood of the process-server's car.

Botwinick says he is the "Rolls-Royce" of the industry because he specializes in the tough cases and does the job right. He charges \$50 an hour, two or three times the going price. His usual fee is \$150.

He's a legend in the business. "My motto is if they're alive, we'll serve 'em. If they're dead, we'll tell you where they're buried."

He grew up in a low-income city project in East New York. His father had polio and couldn't work, so the family was on welfare. Irving got hand-me-down clothes from cousins, "nine sizes too big." He went to school with his pants held up by a safety pin.

"I was always determined to get out of this nightmare of being very, very poor," says Botwinick.

He got into process-serving while working as manager of a law office. He found many process-servers did a poor job — "one guy couldn't find the Empire State Building." He convinced his bosses to let him serve their papers for extra money.

In 1977 he started Serving By Irving — "I wanted a catchy name" — specializing in the hard-to-find.

Among the toughest to serve, Botwinick found, are lawyers and Chasidic Jews. "They're always questioning. If you ask a Chasid, 'are you Shlomo Rabinowitz,' he'll say 'who wants to know?'"

Disguises are big with Irving. He's dressed as a messenger to deliver a bouquet — and subpoena — to a model. His son got dressed in a nun's habit to deliver a summons to a priest. One of his female servers did a strip-o-gram to get her man.

Sometimes Botwinick decides to skip the vaudeville. "I call them up and say my name is so-and-so. I have a subpoena for you, and rather than chase you around town or embarrass you I'd like to make an arrangement with you on where I can deliver it.

"Sometimes they agree to meet me at the diner. Other times they tell me what to do with it. So I say, oh good, if you're gonna hide, hide good because I'm the best in the business. And I get paid by the hour, so make my job hard. As a matter of fact go out of town.

"I work on their heads. Like a psychologist."

Botwinick expects to gross \$1 million this year. He's planning to franchise, starting in Philadelphia in January.

He's 42. He's got a six-bedroom spread in Rockland, drives a gold Jaguar XJS. He's been married twice, has six kids. His idol is Donald Trump.

"He and I think alike. He's a doer, a go-getter. He's a manipulator. Matter of fact we're the same age."

Business is good. Botwinick says, because he's "always there" for his lawyers. "I get beeps from lawyers at 3 in the morning. I always keep the beeper by my bed. If I go to the bathroom I take it with me. If I'm making love, it's right there."