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Serving Subpoenas With a Smile, And an Unusually Dramatic Flair

By WENDY BRANDES

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Irving Botwinick has learned that not everyone appreciates good service.

That's because the owner of a New York company called Serving by Irving makes it his business to get subpoenas into the hands of reluctant recipients. Not only do Mr. Botwinick's employees deliver the documents, they document the deliveries, snapping photos of people holding their papers. The evidence of jobs properly done is meant to counter recipients' claims of not having received a subpoena.

Mr. Botwinick estimates that 40% of his cases involve "avoiders," but his motto is, "If they're alive, we'll serve them; if they're dead, we'll tell you where they're buried."

This devotion costs attorneys with papers to serve a minimum of \$75 an hour. That adds up to revenue of \$1 million a year, Mr. Botwinick says. Business has been so good, in fact, he plans to advertise on Court TV this fall. One ad will re-enact a particularly proud moment: the time an employee submitted to a full medical examination in order to serve papers to an elusive physician.

Alan Crowe, the head of the National Association of Professional Process

Servers, cautions that process serving isn't normally a road to quick riches. Most process servers get \$25 to \$50 for an "uncomplicated" service, he says.

And forget the spy routine. "The woman who has to make an appointment for an exam isn't really what we're about," says Mr. Crowe. "Our association is not about deception and lying."

Mr. Botwinick doesn't entirely agree. "You can legally lie to some people to get to the person," to be served, he explains.

Mr. Botwinick sometimes advertises for employees in Backstage, the theatrical trade publication. "A person has to have creativity in their blood," he says.

A strong constitution also helps. Philip Velez, who recently posed as an autograph seeker at Shea Stadium in order to bestow divorce papers on a visiting pitcher, has been shoved and pummeled. (Not by the pitcher, though.) Another employee had his foot run over when a target made a speedy getaway by car.

But because Mr. Botwinick specializes in medical-malpractice cases, truly life-threatening situations are rare. Doctors are more likely to run than fight, he says. And for those who do run, he has advice: "If you're going to hide, hide well. I get paid by the hour."