

SALINE

Local law firm obtains state record settlement

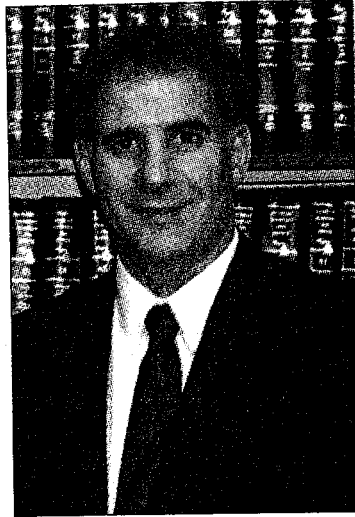
By Sue G. Collins
Special Writer

Attorney Michael J. Garris helped obtain the largest personal injury settlement for a motor vehicle accident in the history of the state of Michigan, according to *Michigan Lawyers Weekly* and other law trade publications.

The Saline resident was instrumental in negotiating the record settlement of \$16 million on behalf of a young man paralyzed after his car was hit in the rear while he was stopped for traffic by a truck driver traveling at a high rate of speed in a construction zone.

Brothers Michael and Steven Garris of Garris, Garris, Garris & Garris, P.C. of Ann Arbor filed the lawsuit in 2003 against the truck driver, the lessor of the truck and the lessee of the truck. The injured person, whose identity was undisclosed during and after the trial, suffered a spinal cord injury, rendering him a tetraplegic.

"This person has moved on after everything. Working with the plaintiff's family has been a humbling experience," said Michael Garris, who has lived in Saline 13 years and has two children in the school district. "We had a very strong liability and that is so crucial. But we also had a client that everybody loved. Even the defense attorney said, 'what a nice person and what a nice family,'" said Garris. "Those factors right there are crucial. Then, when



Michael Garris

economic losses into the future, the risk to the defendants becomes significant."

STILL, THE FIRM had months of work to prepare, starting with "defending the venue" where the action was filed, a county where the truck driver lived that was a more plaintiff-friendly place, according to Garris. Then the truck driver denied fault so Garris had to prove there were no extenuating circumstances the day of the

crash that could have relieved the truck driver of responsibility for what happened.

The case continued as qualified experts were hired, which as a tactic is not unique, but what was unusual was the number of professionals who were brought in to help with the case, according to Garris, whose family firm has practiced law in Ann Arbor for more than 50 years.

"Rarely do we use more than just the treating doctor plus perhaps one other expert. In this case, we

called on eight experts to defend the settlement."

The plaintiff's experts included a life care planner, vocation rehabilitation expert, economic life expectancy expert, structured settlement expert, CPA, financial adviser, and a media company who made a "day in the life" video.

"The video, a tool rarely used," said Garris, "was shown to help educate the various insurance companies on the extent of the injury and the significant effect on the plaintiff's life."