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Crabber's Fall From Dock Results in \$2.75 Million Settlement

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Personal Injury



Colleen Murphy

A \$2.75 million settlement in a Monmouth County premises liability case, *Estate of Shopp v. Belford Seafood Co-operative Inc.*, was reached on Nov. 10 on behalf of the estate of a Belford crabber who fell while walking on a dilapidated dock.

Counsel to the estate of Patrick Shopp, Christopher J. Conrad of Eichen Crutchlow Zaslow in Edison, secured the settlement along with firm managing partner Barry R. Eichen.

Shopp was walking on the dock when a broken board caused him to fall six feet onto the crabbing equipment on the deck of his boat below. As a result of the fall, Shopp sustained a perforated colon, which required multiple surgeries over the course of the next 15 months.

While litigation was ongoing, Shopp died at age 54 of sepsis due to complications associated with his injury, Conrad said.

Shopp's estate argued that he was a business invitee of Belford Seafood, and that the company failed to inspect and maintain the dock in a safe and orderly condition. Belford Seafood argued that although they owned the water and seafloor of the creek where they rented boat slips, they had no ownership or responsibility for the actual docks. The company claimed the docks were the responsibility of the individual fishermen, Conrad said.

The \$2.75 million settlement was reached on Nov. 10, while the parties were preparing for trial.

"No amount of recovery could ever replace the loss to Mr. Shopp's family," said Conrad. "Hopefully, Barry and I were able to at least provide some comfort and closure as they attempt to move forward."

"This was a difficult case in terms of liability and sheer volume of discovery," added Conrad. "Simply, this outcome would not have been possible without Barry's guidance and support."

Counsel to Belford Seafood, Michael F. Lynch of the Law Office of Linda Baumann in East Windsor, didn't return a call seeking comment.

— Colleen Murphy

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