

# Brothers who own Hamptons TV to be inducted into hall of fame

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Greg, left, and Ernie Schimizzi founded WVVH-Hamptons TV in 1994. Credit: Gordon M. Grant

Ernie and Greg Schimizzi, owners of WVVH-Hamptons TV, headed down a wooded road a few weeks ago to the technological heart of their station. They looked up at a 500-foot transmission tower on top of a hill.

" We put in a brand-new transmitter and hung a new antenna," Greg said of the installation last January." We didn't climb 500 feet up on the stick, but we worked with the engineers and the guys who do the rigging."

The Federal Communications Commission in a big moment in 2018 moved WVVH from broadcast channel 50 to 18, even more prime real estate, setting the stage for the new antenna and frequency.

On Oct. 28, there will be another big, if symbolic, moment for the

Schimizzis. Greg, 72, chairman of WVVH parent Video Voice, and Ernie, 70, Video Voice president and WVVH general manager, are being inducted into the [New York State Broadcasters Hall of Fame](#) at the Rainbow Room in Manhattan with six others from 2020 and 2021.



Ernie and Greg Schimizzis, who in 1994 founded WVVH, and independent television station on the East End, in the station's office in East Hampton. Credit: Gordon M. Grant

" They are the first brothers to be inducted," said David Donovan, president of the New York State Broadcasters Association." WVVH-Hamptons TV epitomizes what broadcasting is all about, serving the local community. They're a team. They deserve to be put in the Hall of Fame together!"

They will join the likes of Walter Cronkite, Barbara Walters, Regis Philbin and Tom Murphy, former CEO of Capital Cities/ABC. The Schimizzis have won Emmys, but the broadcasters association award recognizes their careers and how they built a station that reaches millions of viewers over multiple platforms.

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## Work and play

In 1994, the Schimizzi brothers launched WVVH, its call letters short for Video Voice Hamptons. It can be viewed on Channel 78 on Altice on the East End; Channel 14 on FiOS in Nassau, Suffolk, New York City, Rockland, Westchester, Orange counties and Greenwich, Connecticut; and over the air from eastern Suffolk to southern Connecticut, Rhode Island and Block Island.

" They're both characters. They bring joy to what they do," said Shanette Cohen, executive director of the Hampton Classic Horse Show, which WVVH has broadcast since 1996." They play a big role on the East End of Long Island, covering events and sharing information!"

The brothers divide duties: Greg handles computers, social media and production, while Ernie handles legal, business and sales. They are supported by a staff of four.



**The Schimizzi Bros.  
November 16, 1977 Establishing Video Voice, Inc.**

Ernie and Greg Schimizzi on Nov. 16, 1977, in their first Video Voice Inc. office. Credit: Video Voice Inc.

" Working with my brother isn't work," Ernie said. " It's play!"

As they talk, it becomes clear their story isn't simply of two businessmen, but a bond between brothers that decades and initially different career paths couldn't break.

" Every birthday party I've had, my brother has been present. I've been at every one of his, no matter where in the world I am," Ernie said of traveling home for the occasion. " I've always been there for my brother and my brother has been there for me!"

Greg and Ernie Schimizzi's father, Joseph, and mother, Alfonsina, emigrated in the 1930s from Italy to Brooklyn. Their father worked as a manager at Bay Ridge, Brooklyn-based Waljohn Plastics, which made toys, luggage components and plastic bags. Their mother was a seamstress.



Ernie and Greg Schimizzi at NBC Studios at Rockefeller Center in 1957. Credit: Schimizzi Family

" Whenever we had a toy, we shared," Greg said. " We had a bicycle: I rode the bike and Ernie would ride on the bar!"

Their father took them on trips to Manhattan, including NBC's studios. A 1957 photo of the boys outside the studios hangs in their

office. They recall walking around the "Today" show set with cameras and cables, as if they had crossed to the other side of the screen.

"That freedom of access to TV made a lasting impression," Ernie said.

TV became not just images flickering on a screen, but something real, diverting and comforting during difficult times, they said. They watched "The Honeymooners," in which Jackie Gleason's character lives in Brooklyn. To them, it felt as if he lived down the block.

### **A shock to the family**

The Schimizzis lived on a tree-lined block in Dyker Heights, Brooklyn, near relatives, but their family was about to be torn apart. Ernie was 11 when he came home in September 1962 to find their father dead from a massive heart attack. "We were overcome with fear and sorrow," Greg said.

The brothers helped their mother, who made about \$54 a week sewing garments 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.

"We anchored ourselves down to make my mother happy. Whatever we did, we did in unison," Greg said. "Above all, we wanted to make her laugh."

They depended on each other and drew closer. "Our mother was a single parent," Ernie said. "That forged what we are as brothers."

She bought them a typewriter for Christmas and a tape recorder the following year, hoping they wouldn't focus on the loss of their father.

"We pretended at times we were broadcasting on radio," Greg said.

Then she bought them a Heathkit so they could build a color TV, a product that they see as the first step toward creating their own station." It came with a million parts," Greg said.

When the reception got fuzzy, they soldered, which terrified their aunt, who was convinced they would be electrocuted.

" My mother said, 'They know what they're doing,'" Greg said." That gave us confidence!"

Ernie graduated from New York University with an MBA in 1974, and Greg got a master's degree in psychology from NYU in 1976. Greg worked as a psychologist for the Veterans Affairs in Brooklyn for 16 years, often with Vietnam War veterans; Ernie worked for a film distributor in Manhattan. But when Greg learned to shoot video of patients to play back to them, he experienced a revelation.

" I told my brother, 'This thing is unbelievable. This is something we have to do,'" Greg said of video." 'Let's open our own business.'"

In 1977, they opened Video Voice as a film distributor and then producer. Since Ernie worked for a distributor, they felt they couldn't use their names.

" We went by the name of Joseph Wolfe in testament to my father," Ernie said." We called him 'the wolf' because he had a receding hairline!"

Despite their father's death, the brothers felt their father's presence in their lives, looking out for them as they distributed and then produced movies in collaboration with such companies as Canadian Broadcasting Corp. and Macmillan Publishing, and sold films to network and cable companies.

The brothers, who had moved to East Hampton in 1986, heard that a license for an off-the-air Southampton station was for sale: They bought it and got to work preparing technology and programming. WVVH hit the air in 1994 with their mother watching from home.

" She was the first viewer," Greg said." She said, 'That's the most beautiful thing I've seen!'"

## **Changing times**

Over the years, the Schimizzis have adapted their station to changing content. In the 1990s, WVVH became among the earlier stations to broadcast Bloomberg TV. In the early 2000s, they began streaming on the Internet.

" We changed the equipment and evolved," Greg said." In those days, it was revolutionary!"

Today, they have programs from such affiliates as Youtoo America television (lifestyle programming) and Outside TV (surfing, skiing and other recreational sports). They carry NTD News, based in Manhattan, along with movies, original programs and local event coverage — like the Hampton Classic Horse Show and Hamptons International Film Festival.

" It encourages us," Ernie said of airing new locally produced programs like " Shades of Long Island" and " USA Warrior Stories," which won a New York State Broadcasters Association award this month." We're allowing new voices and people!"

They can manage the station remotely via iPhone, an innovation that was helpful during the pandemic." The phone is what a whole news truck filled with equipment used to be," Greg said." It's all now in your pocket!"

" Everything you see here, the technology, leaves here on a fiber optic the size of a human hair," Ernie said during a recent tour." It all comes down to that!"

They look at the Hall of Fame induction as a confirmation of the value of their work." We made money, we brought in other people, we created an identity for ourselves that sets us apart," Ernie added.

They also see their careers as keeping a promise to their mother, who died in 2000, to be there for each other.

" She made it very clear that it was us against the world. [She was] a single mom who says to her children, 'Be good. Make yourself successful. Make me proud,'" Ernie said." That's what we aim for every day."

It's personal as well as professional. For example, when Greg recently needed dental work in Brooklyn, Ernie drove him." The dentist said, 'We enjoy having the two of you together,'" Greg said." It's like a team. They take comfort in seeing two brothers engaging with each other!"

Greg and his wife, Francine, have two sons, Joseph, 36, and Gregory, 34. Ernie has stayed single.

Do they ever talk about retiring?" Never," Greg said.

Donovan sees them as brothers" who suffered tragedy early on in their lives" and created something singular together." Their competition are some of the largest companies in the world," he said." They have done a tremendous job!"

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