



## Stafford named Officer of Year at luncheon

Lance Shearer, Correspondent

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*Criminologist replays Simpson murder trial at Hideaway event*

Twenty five years later, the O.J. case still gets people worked up.

The Marco Police Foundation drew a packed, sellout crowd for “Lunch with the Chief” at Hideaway Beach Club on Tuesday. The nearly 200 people weren’t there just to see the foundation’s officers and directors sworn in, or even to learn the identity of the officer of the year.

City Council Chairman Erik Brechnitz did indeed swear in the slate of officers, led by president John DeRosa, and the 2018 Officer of the Year honor was presented to Jeff Stafford by DeRosa and Chief Al Schettino, who noted his role in saving the life of a prospective jumper off the Jolley Bridge, among other achievements. Hector Diaz, Jr., son of MIPD Sgt. Hector Diaz, and Marco Island Brewery owner Mike Jones were also recognized. Four new police officers were briefly introduced.

But the big draw was the presentation of criminologist and Marco Island resident Vernon Geberth, who was closely involved with coverage of the trial of football star O.J.



Simpson for the murder of his ex-wife Nicole and Ronald Goldman. The trial, and particularly the forensic police work that led up to it and contributed to the verdict, gave Geberth a topic he clearly feels passionate about to this day.

Geberth has an extensive history as a law enforcement officer, author of 10 books on criminology, professor, and expert witness on criminal matters.

During the O.J. trial, Geberth appeared on “Inside Edition,” Fox News, and Maury Povich’s show. Povich, he said, would barely let him get out a sentence without an interruption. Geberth retired as a lieutenant commander of the NYPD, commander of the Bronx Homicide Task Force, which handled over 400 homicides each year.

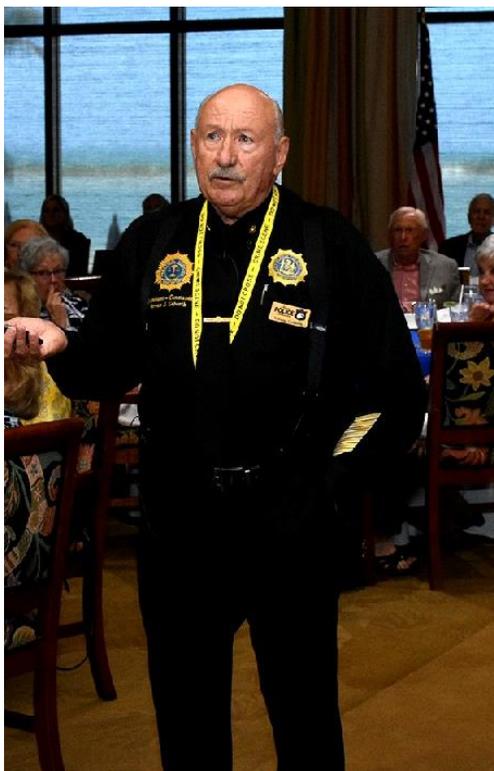


He titled his talk to the Marco Police Foundation “The O.J. Simpson Case – Justice Derailed,” and laid out the many factors that led to Simpson’s acquittal. Slides accompanying his talk included fascinating tidbits of information not generally seen by the public, including the handwritten, and misspelled note, O.J. wrote before surrendering to police, the “bloody gloves” as they were

found, one at the crime scene and one allegedly outside Simpson’s mansion, and an interview in which Simpson apparently skated close to admitting guilt.

Slides also included illustrations of Nicole Simpson in death, and the wounds that killed her. Geberth explained he used the illustrations to spare his audience from looking at the actual photos, but the illustrations themselves were gruesome enough to make some of the viewers queasy.

The prosecution had a “slam dunk” case based on the evidence, said Geberth, but the case likely turned on a change of venue, when it was moved from Simpson’s exclusive Brentwood to downtown Los Angeles – the better, he said, to facilitate the participants’ access to the media, particularly television reporters – in a community still tense from the aftermath of the Rodney



King video, trial and unrest.

Geberth called the verdict an example of “jury nullification,” saying and posting on a slide that “despite overwhelming evidence of guilt these racial minority jurors decided to acquit O.J. Simpson as a protest against the system.” The O.J. verdict on Oct. 3, 1995, Geberth noted, divided white and black America in their reactions, or at least highlighted the division that existed in perceptions.



Geberth noted that the subsequent civil trial, in which Simpson was ordered to pay millions to the estates of his victims, restored a measure of justice for a flawed prosecution.



**Criminologist ( Cmdr. Vernon Geberth) replays Simpson murder trial at Hideaway event**

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