

Panels say O.J. Trial distorts Justice System

By Ludmilla Lelis- Press Manahawkin Bureau

“ Retired Superior Court Judge Mark Addison says what happens in criminal courts differs from what is seen on television”

The verdict on the O.J. Simpson trial?

The public is being misled into believing the Los Angeles trial represents everyday criminal justice, according to speakers at a Long Beach Island legal symposium. “It will take a long time for people to realize that what happens in the criminal courts isn’t what is happening on TV,” said retired Ocean County Superior Court Judge Mark Addison, who moderated the discussion, “After O.J.... What? , held last night at the island branch of the Ocean County Library.

Members of the panel, Ocean County Prosecutor Edward J. Dimon, George K. Koukos, an attorney with the Public Defender’s Office, and criminal trial lawyer A. Charles Peruto Jr., agreed that the Simpson trial should be viewed as unique and not typical of what occurs in the courts, particularly in New Jersey.

Long Beach Island attorney James Wilson organized the symposium and with the goal of discussing how the well-publicized homicide trial will affect future criminal cases.

“ I would absolutely love to have Judge Ito presiding over one of my cases . There is absolutely no way I could get all the things these attorneys are getting,” Peruto said, referring to the admission of explosive evidence and testimony that have been making headlines. “You’re not learning anything about a real criminal trial. This just pertains to O.J. It’s good entertainment value, but it’s not like any trial I’ve been involved with,” Peruto said.

Panelists agreed that the public is getting an education by watching the trial, and would not be exposed to how the justice system operates any other way. They were all of the opinion that the “trial of the century” will not change actual trial procedures, or jurisprudence. However, they noted that the money spent and the surrounding media circus make this case peculiar.

Addison was particularly critical of the way Judge Lance Ito has not maintained control over the lawyers, again emphasizing that the O.J. case is atypical. “What is happening there doesn’t happen when you have a judge running a trial? It happens when counsel is running the judge,” Addison said. “I, like other judges, were shocked when he allowed state in presenting its case to use defense testimony.”

In the end, the greatest effect of the trial may be the burden placed on law enforcement, in trying to prosecute criminals, and on public defenders, in trying to prove their innocence. “It’s going to raise the defendant’s expectations. We want what we saw on TV,” said Dimon, who said that the public defender’s budget could skyrocket if suspects believed they could have access to the DNA experts that O.J.’s attorney have used.

Noting that Simpson is able to pay for the experts to try and prove him innocent, Koukos assured those using the Public Defender's Office that although "we may not be the best defense that money can buy, they're still getting a good defense,"