

CSI comes to high school law class

By Tony Pearson

The law class at North Hastings High School knows something that the O.J. Simpson jury didn't ? namely, that footprint evidence demonstrated he was almost certainly at the scene of the crime when his wife and her friend were murdered.

The class learned about the forensic science that goes into criminal cases from long-time OPP CSI detective Jim Eadie. Eadie (now known around here as a reporter for Bancroft This Week) spent two decades in the provincial police force pouring over hundreds of crime scenes ? checking for fingerprints, footprints, tool marks, tire tracks, DNA, and other evidence ? and then taking photos and making maps and charts which he presented to judges and juries at all levels of Ontario's criminal justice system. He has taught forensics at the Canadian Police College, the OPP Academy, the University of Toronto, Queen's, and many other post-secondary institutions, including Loyalist College. He's been a commentator on numerous TV shows, and was even a special guest on KNBC Los Angeles during the Simpson trial.

He explained to the NHHS students the importance of precision in presenting evidence. One of the phrases he never used was "It's a match." Eadie noted that this phrase, used about fibres, helped convict Guy Paul Morin of a murder which he had nothing to do with. It later developed that the "matching" fibres came from a sweater worn by the examiner herself.

Nonetheless, he stated that uncontaminated forensic evidence was superior to all others. "Witnesses often see things quite differently from each other, and from reality. But properly collected physical evidence doesn't lie." He observed that almost nothing in the universe is identical to anything else: "Every piece of clothing, every car, every tool ? they all wear/age/rip/crease/break differently. Just like fingerprints, no two shoes or tires are exactly the same."

He stressed that the keys to effective collection of evidence were planning and preparation, and an ability not to rush to judgment. Even evidence that seems to be absolute can be misleading or fraudulent. Photos and videos, for example, can be edited and fakes which is why [Video Forensic Experts](#) are needed to verify them. Keeping an open mind when investigating is crucial. "When at a crime scene, the first thing I did was stop and look around; you can ruin the evidence if you go barging around ? especially if you've made up your mind way too soon about what happened and who's guilty." Calm and intelligent deliberation doesn't make for great TV, but it's essential in real life.

Students learned a number of things that you don't see on television ? like how paper bags rather than plastic ones are used to collect evidence, how it's almost impossible to wipe a place clean of fingerprints, and why criminals should never try to wash blood down a sink.

And the O.J. trial? Eadie noted that boot prints at the crime scene came from very expensive Italian-made shoes in Simpson's size, of which only four pair had been sold in the U.S. However, the prosecution couldn't prove that Simpson owned a pair, and couldn't find them at his house. Only after the trial had concluded was a photo discovered, which showed Simpson wearing a pair to a football game just two weeks before the murders.