

Retired jail officer sues village in assault claim

BY MICHAEL O'KEEFE
michael.okeefe@newsday.com

A retired Nassau County correction officer filed a federal lawsuit yesterday claiming Garden City and its police department violated his civil rights after village officers mistook the Mineola man for a shoplifter and verbally and physically assaulted him.

The lawsuit, filed in U.S. District Court Eastern District by Ronald Lanier, 53, alleges the two white Garden City cops

racially profiled the 22-year veteran jail guard in a confrontation late last year inside a Mineola supermarket.

At a news conference yesterday in the Hempstead office of his attorney, Frederick Brewington, Lanier said officers George Byrd and John Russell came up from behind and threw him to the ground inside the Western Beef supermarket on Second Street. The lawsuit says that before knocking Lanier to the ground, the officers had ordered him to

put his hands behind his back.

"They whispered in my ear and said, 'You want to be a tough guy?'" Lanier said of the officers' actions Nov. 30 after they pinned him to the ground.

"They started beating me on both sides of my ribs," Lanier said.

Brewington said the officers were looking for an African-American man who had allegedly shoplifted a purse from a store before running into Western Beef. The pursuing officers then

saw Lanier, Brewington said.

"We know on that day that had Mr. Lanier been a white man, he never would have been grabbed," Brewington said. "They grabbed the first black man that they saw and assumed he was a criminal."

The lawsuit seeks at least \$40 million in damages and names as defendants, the Village of Garden City, its police department, Byrd, Russell and two other officers. An attorney for the village, Andrew Preston, did not return a call for

comment. The Garden City Police Benevolent Association, could not be reached. It was not clear yesterday if Byrd, Russell or the other officers have hired personal defense attorneys.

District Attorney Madeline Singas' office chose not to file charges against the officers.

"That doesn't mean civil rights weren't violated," Brewington said yesterday.

Shortly after the attack, Lanier said, he had told the officers in the store that he did nothing wrong, according to

the lawsuit, but Byrd and Russell responded with orders for Lanier to shut up and then verbally and physically assaulted him. The officers further humiliated Lanier, he said yesterday, by walking him in handcuffs through the store and then holding him in the back of a police car for 20 minutes.

Lanier was released after police found the alleged suspect hiding on the roof of the supermarket. Garden City police have never apologized to him, Lanier said.



Ronald Lanier says cops beat him.

HOWARD SCHWAB