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## DETROIT'S ROBOCOP ALLEGEDLY LED RING

By BEN SCHMITT  
*The Detroit Free Press*

DETROIT He's known as RoboCop. In 1996, he and his Detroit Police partner shot and killed an unarmed man during a traffic stop.

When the case settled in 1999 for more than \$1 million, Officer William Melendez had been sued four times for the alleged use of unreasonable force.

On Thursday, a federal grand jury indicted the 9-year veteran of the Detroit Police Department as a leader in a ring of 17 southwest Detroit cops who allegedly shook down drug suspects during illegal searches.

Thursday was an odd contrast to a year ago, when the Detroit Police Officers Association honored Melendez as its 4th (Fort-Green) Precinct Officer of the Year for making more than 300 arrests in 2001. Muscular and tattooed, Melendez made an appearance Thursday in U.S. District Court. He was locked up overnight, pending a detention hearing today.

Federal prosecutors want Melendez held pending trial, saying he poses a danger to the community.

Why the nickname?

"If you've seen him, he is in outstanding physical condition and is probably built like the Hulk," 4th Precinct Commander Charles Barbieri said Thursday. "I can't say anything bad about him."

Southfield attorney Geoffrey Fieger has a different opinion.

Fieger represented the wife of Lou Adkins, shot and killed Aug. 3, 1996, by Melendez and his partner, Dominic Gonzales. The officers stopped Adkins at 10:20 p.m. that night at Vernor and Lawndale on suspicion of a felony firearm allegation. Gonzales wasn't named in the indictment.

At the time, police said Adkins scuffled with the officers after the traffic stop and tried to grab one of their guns. Several witnesses said the officers shot Adkins 11 times, while he was down on the ground, unarmed, according to court records.

"And nothing happened to this guy, Melendez," Fieger said Thursday.

U.S. Attorney Jeffrey Collins on Thursday labeled Melendez as one of the primary defendants in a eight-count corruption indictment against 17 officers.

Barbieri said he was shocked to hear that Melendez is a criminal suspect. "I would call him a guy that I have seen some leadership skills from," he said. "I hate to see him be labeled a ringleader."

According to the indictment, Melendez and two officers illegally arrested Victoria Tillmon on June 16, 2001, outside her home in the 3500 block of Wesson and falsely claimed she

Wesson and falsely claimed she dropped a vial of crack co-caine. On the way to the police station, the indictment said, Melendez threatened her, saying that people who testify against him will be killed.

On Feb. 26, 2001, Melendez and two officers illegally entered a residence at 3820 Wesson and illegally searched Clifton White and Shannon White. The officers falsely reported that they confronted the pair on the street and that Clifton White was carrying cocaine.

In a lawsuit filed March 12 in U.S. District Court, a Detroit man accused Melendez and Officer Troy Bradley of concocting a gun case that landed the man in jail for 213 days.

In his lawsuit, Darell Chancellor said Melendez and Bradley arrested him and another man, Robert Louis Blackwell, near midnight on April 22, 2002, on Clippert Street.

The suit says that Melendez and Bradley, after a routine stop, planted handguns that led to federal charges against Chancellor. He was held in jail from April through November last year, until the U.S. Attorney's Office agreed to his release on bond, the suit says. On Nov. 26, the U.S. Attorney's Office asked for charges to be dropped against Chancellor.