

WEDNESDAY, MAY 02, 2007 9:19 AM

Parish's wife said to be cooperating in probe

BY SCHUYLER KROPF AND KYLE STOCK

The Post and Courier

Nearly three weeks after economist Al Parish's arrest, his wife is said to be cooperating with authorities probing the collapse of his multimillion dollar investment empire. But like the investors who say they've been ripped off by Parish, she faces an uncertain future.

Yolanda Yoder, a mother of four, hasn't slept in her own home since April 5, the day investigators came to seize the couple's assets. She has not been accused of civil or criminal wrongdoing, but her financial forecast remains bleak and she almost certainly will be caught up in her husband's web of mounting debts.

Yoder, 45, is listed as a 49 percent owner in Parish Economics LLC, one of the entities named in a five-count civil fraud complaint filed by the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission.

Determining the depth of Yoder's knowledge and involvement in the overall operation is the key to her future, both in terms of freedom and her finances, legal experts say.

"If she was a knowing participant in the scheme, then she has the same level of liability and culpability that he has," said University of South Carolina law school professor Gregory Adams, whose speciality includes federal securities. "If she did not know, then the mere fact that she owns an interest in the LLC would not subject her to liability."

However, an incident that court documents portray as her last-ditch effort to squirrel away assets has drawn scrutiny from angry investors. The SEC contends that as the case against her husband broke, Yoder, citing her husband's alleged bout of amnesia, used his power of attorney to instruct an administrative assistant to begin transferring cash into the names of family members "in disbursements of a small enough size to avoid government reporting obligations." The assistant refused to move the money and was fired, the SEC said.

The U.S. Attorney's Office in Charleston has declined to give further details about the incident beyond what is presented in the court filings. The court record also states that the SEC "does not have information regarding any subsequent activities by Parish's wife."

In recent weeks, Yoder hired two attorneys, one to represent her in connection with the SEC civil charges and another to address any criminal charges that may come. Her civil lawyer, Michael Timbes, said it appears Yoder's involvement in her husband's failed investment pools, which reportedly has cost nearly 600 investors about \$523 million on paper, was minimal.

Yoder was not "on site," Timbes said, nor was she a paid employee. She has not returned e-mail messages and Timbes said Yoder declined a request for an interview.

Yoder looks forward to explaining the money transfer allegation, Timbes said. "There are two sides to that," he said, adding that Yoder is cooperating in the case, an assertion backed up by investigators.

Her criminal lawyer, Charleston attorney Paul Thurmond, said he wants Yoder to talk and cooperate with the U.S. Attorney's Office but is waiting to hear from prosecutors who have charged her husband with lying to investigators and providing false documents. They are continuing to build a criminal case and more charges against him are expected.

Thurmond said the couple did not hide money in offshore accounts, which has been the focus of part of the effort to find assets. Investigators, likewise, don't think any foreign accounts were opened and believe much of the money was either spent or invested in "hard assets," including art.

Before the collapse of Parish's financial empire, the couple had an almost storybook life, living on a modern, sprawling lakefront estate near Summerville. She was a computer science professor at Charleston Southern University, which hired Parish to teach economics in 1990. They married on New Year's Eve 1994. It was a first marriage for both, court records show. Though she owned part of her husband's investing venture, Yoder kept a low profile while Parish put on a showy front as the public face of CSU and the featured economic forecaster of the Charleston Metro Chamber of Commerce.

Since her husband's arrest and incarceration in the Charleston County jail, Yoder and their children are staying with relatives near Hollywood, living on a federal court-approved one month allowance of \$11,000.

Reach **Schuyler Kropf** at 937-5551 or skropf@postandcourier.com.

Reach **Kyle Stock** at kstock@postandcourier.com.