

## **Parish's breakdown**

June 11, 2007

*By Dan McCue,  
Staff Writer*

When Al Parish returned to his office at Charleston Southern University after delivering his economic forecast for the Charleston Metro Chamber of Commerce on March 29, he began to complain to an assistant of a severe headache and trouble with his vision.

As his condition deteriorated, an assistant drove him across the street to Trident Medical Center. By this time, Parish was confused and disoriented, according to medical records revealed in court during Parish's bond hearing.

An extensive medical evaluation that included a full cardiac workup, a brain function test and an evaluation to rule out stroke, all found nothing to suggest why Parish was in crisis, the records said.

All that was known was that Parish seemed to be suffering from such an acute case of amnesia, that he didn't know who he was, what he did for a living, where he lived or even who his wife and four young children were.

His condition was relatively unchanged a few days later when he was transferred to the Medical University of South Carolina.

In fact, said Susan Hardesty, the forensic psychiatrist who has been working with Parish the past six weeks, he had to be reintroduced to his children upon his admission there.

Hardesty met with Parish on five occasions and one of her colleagues has met with him twice.

According to Hardesty's testimony at Parish's bond hearing, it appears Parish genuinely suffered acute onset of associative amnesia.

"It's something that can occur when someone is under extreme stress," she said.

While some might continue to insist Parish is faking his condition, Hardesty pointed out amnesia is not considered a valid defense in a criminal trial and would ultimately have no impact on trying the case.

A battery of psychological tests since his initial admission to the hospital found no personality disorders and no bipolar condition, but did define Parish as a narcissistic personality with histrionic traits.

"In my opinion, Al Parish had problems with anxiety," Hardesty said.

### **Immutable fashion sense**

Prosecutor Carlton Bourne didn't give up on Parish's continued incarceration without a fight. Under his

cross examination, Hardesty confessed that conditions such as Parish's are rare and said she's seen it only three or four times over the course of her career.

Bourne asked Hardesty to describe what Parish was wearing the first time she met him. She described him as wearing a purple shirt, purple sweat pants and a pair of Crocs.

"Is it possible to forget one's name and not their fashion sense?" Bourne asked.

"I assume he put on whatever was in his closet," Hardesty replied.

Hardesty also testified that Parish told her he knew mathematics, science and statistics but was surprised to hear he supposedly knew economics.

When told that his former employer, Charleston Southern University, had been among his investors and had in fact entrusted him with \$10 million in university funds, Parish is said to have responded, "If I was a research professor, why would I be involved in investments?"

"It doesn't make any sense that my employer would allow me to handle its money. I don't have any knowledge of investing."

Parish also maintained that he did not know what a brokerage statement was, Hardesty said.

Bourne bore in.

"Could that be considered unusual, that he would remember his knowledge of some subjects, but declare a complete lack of knowledge in the one area involved in this case?" he asked. "Could it be that he's merely distancing himself from economics and investment knowledge? Could it be also that his memory has dramatically improve as a result of his learning amnesia is not a viable defense?"

Hardesty said her diagnosis was based on an extensive process of exclusion meant to eliminate the possibility of faking a condition.

"I really do think this amnesia is a byproduct of his make-up, of his personality style, which was definitely histrionic," she said. "His manner of dress and personality was flamboyant, exaggerated, and his emotional responses to things were also."

*Dan McCue is a staff writer for the Business Journal. E-mail him at [dmccue@charlestonbusiness.com](mailto:dmccue@charlestonbusiness.com).*