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With auction, Parish fraud case approaches its first crescendo

By Dan McCue , Staff Writer

For Jim Scarborough, today and Saturday's auction of economist Al Parish's ill-gotten assets at the Charleston Area Convention Center, is effectively the end of the treasure hunt.

Parish, a former professor with Charleston Southern University, has been charged with 11 criminal and five civil counts related to his management of five investment pools through, which he allegedly defrauded as many as 500 individuals of about \$55 million.

Scarborough, a private investigator who helped the court-appointed receiver gather Parish's assets after the charges were lodged, said he still marvels at the magnitude of it all.

Of course, the question now, is how much it brings in for his investors," Scarborough said. "Right now all any of us involved in the case can do is hope for the best."

Both serious bidders and the merely curious turned out early this morning to participate in what's believed to be the largest auction of a single person's assets in Charleston history.

Even before the bidding began at 11 a.m., J. David Dantzler, the receiver's attorney, said they had received a pre-auction bid of \$1.25 million for all Parish's watches, many of which are encrusted with diamonds and other jewels.

While Dantzler said he still hoped a similar sizable bid would materialize for Parish's now infamous Mont Blanc pen collection, as of this morning, it had not materialized.

Likewise, while a number of individuals have inquired about guitars that once belonged to Jimi Hendrix, Rolling Stones singer Keith Richards and the late

former Beatle George Harrison, there has been no serious pre-auction offer for those items either.

“A lot of people are talking around making an offer, but they just haven’t pulled the trigger on a deal,” Dantzler said.

On a brighter note, though final tabulations have not been done, Dantzler said a 90% off tag sale of items from the now defunct A.J. Davis & Sons store, which Parish bought in 2005, did much better than was anticipated.

“At the outset, we thought at best the store’s creditors would see a return of 50 cents on the dollar, but our sense now is that they did much better than that,” Dantzler said.

George Reed, a former Sotheby’s appraiser who has been assisting in preparations for the auction, said he agreed with an assessment by Dantzler on Wednesday that raising \$1 million through the sale of less valuable items in Parish’s bizarre collection, like his myriad gnomes and Red Skelton paintings, would be a home run

But even if the auction exceeds everyone’s expectations, the eventual return to aggrieved investors, is expected to be quite small.

“Basically what’s going to happen is this,” Dantzler explained. “All of the money raised through the auction will go into a single fund, the receivership. From there, the expenses of the receivership will be paid first, with court approval, followed by payments to those creditors of Parish’s who have perfected their claims of loans and security interests, and then, whatever’s left, that’s what will go to investors—and of course, all of this is something that won’t occur until the end of the case.”

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