

Hit-run defendant was drinking, ex-colleague testifies

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A former co-worker of Heather Hulseley testified in court Wednesday that the woman admitted to her that she was drunk when she tried to tell her to dial 911.

Michelle Torres, 18, a one-time employee at the Montecito Country Club, testified that on July 27 she got a phone call from a crying Ms. Hulseley telling her that she thought she had driven over a ditch, but then said she saw a man on the ground.

Ms. Hulseley, 20, is charged with vehicular manslaughter, driving under the influence, and hit-and-run in the death of Dr. Ronald Shlensky, a prominent Montecito psychiatrist, who investigators say was struck while walking his dog in the 700 block of Knapp Drive. Ms. Hulseley has pleaded not guilty.

During the second day of testimony in the preliminary hearing before Judge Joseph Lodge in Santa Barbara Superior Court, Ms. Torres testified that Ms. Hulseley was "stressed" and "panicked" when she called as Ms. Torres was leaving her job at the country club, where Ms. Hulseley had worked as a lifeguard. Ms. Hulseley had been at the club with friends allegedly drinking vodka earlier that day.

Ms. Torres, a freshman at Sonoma State University, said Ms. Hulseley admitted to her one week later, while dropping her off at her house, that she had hit a man. "I said, 'Did you do it?' She said 'Yes,' " Ms. Torres testified. She also stated that Ms. Hulseley told her not to tell anyone.

In her testimony, Ms. Torres said Ms. Hulseley told her she was going to get dents from hitting the man removed from her car and that she was going to say they were from golf balls.

Ms. Torres testified that she witnessed Ms. Hulseley take sips from a flask containing vodka that day, as well as drinking alcohol concealed in a Blenders in the Grass cup. Ms. Torres admitted to taking sips of the drinks from those containers as well.

During cross-examination by defense attorney Mindy Boulet, Ms. Torres testified that when police questioned her about the accident, she said she only knew about it because of what was being reported in the newspapers. "I didn't want to show that I knew anything," she said. "I didn't want to get involved."

On Tuesday, Maggie Alvarado, 20, another friend of Ms. Hulseley, testified that she, too, did not disclose to police all that she knew about the case because she was "trying to be a good friend."

Both witnesses admitted they had been drinking alcohol with Ms. Hulseley at the country club.

Another friend of Ms. Hulseley who was at the pool that day, Dannielle Favela, 23, testified that the

night before the accident, Ms. Hulseley had "drank to excess" and had "passed out" on her couch after consuming vodka during a party at her apartment. "The boys that were there began to draw on her with markers," she said.

She stated that Ms. Hulseley had a history of drinking, and said she would "pass out anywhere and everywhere."

Ms. Favela testified that Ms. Hulseley also confided in her that she had struck Mr. Shlensky with her vehicle. During her testimony, she said she was "angered" when Ms. Hulseley later changed her story and said that she thought her friends, Maggie Alvarado and Gabriela Trelles, who had been driving in another car, may have done it.

Greg Wilkins, a criminal investigator for the District Attorney's Office, testified that during the investigation, Ms. Hulseley's Toyota 4Runner was retrieved from an auto body shop in Ventura, and that a dent consistent with a typical pedestrian impact was found on the front driver's side bumper of the car.

Testimony is expected to wrap up today.

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