

Local

Hit-run suspect faces new questions

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A woman accused of vehicular manslaughter and drunken driving in the death of a prominent Montecito psychiatrist is trying to get a job as a baby sitter, stating she has a clean driving record, according to documents obtained by the News-Press.

In a Jan. 22 e-mail response to an online help wanted ad, Heather Lea Hulsey, who is also accused of hit-and-run in connection with the July 27, 2006, death of her neighbor, Dr. Ronald Shlensky, wrote, "I have a clean driving record and a valid California driver's license."

The woman who placed the ad at sbparent.com, Melissa Murdoch, told the News-Press she recognized the 20-year-old's name but couldn't figure out why. Then she Googled it and read News-Press coverage of the case.



Hulsey

Dr. Shlensky, 71, founder of the American Journal of Forensic Psychiatry, was walking his dog in the 700 block of Knapp Drive when he was struck. The father of three and grandfather of four died the next day at Santa Barbara Cottage Hospital.

"I was shocked at the nerve that she could portray herself as someone with a clean driving record," said Ms. Murdoch, who is a friend of the Shlensky family. "The response sounded great. Had I not known her name, I would have called her in a second because she sounded like a great candidate, which is the frightening part."

The ad, which was for a 15- to 20-hour a week position and paid \$15 per hour, indicated that a valid driver's license was required. It also directed applicants to e-mail a short paragraph about themselves and their experience.

Technically, Ms. Hulsey's driving record is clean and her license is valid. In most cases, motorists arrested on suspicion of drunken driving are given a blood-alcohol test. Law enforcement then notifies the Department of Motor Vehicles about the pending charges and the license is suspended.

However, Ms. Hulsey was not arrested until Aug. 3, 2006 -- after a News-Press article about the investigation prompted a tipster to call the California Highway Patrol. Blood-alcohol tests would have been moot at that point. Therefore, a suspension form was not sent to the DMV.

It wasn't until more witness information surfaced that the District Attorney's Office filed the charge of drunken driving.

Following her arrest, Ms. Hulsey reportedly told CHP officers she was reaching for her cell phone, which had fallen to the floor of her Toyota 4Runner, when she struck Dr. Shlensky, authorities said.

A preliminary hearing is set for March, when a judge will decide whether the case should go to trial. If convicted, Ms. Hulsey's license would be suspended. She faces a potential maximum of four years in state prison.

Repeated attempts to reach Ms. Hulsey were unsuccessful. Her defense lawyer, Deputy Public Defender Mindi Boulet, did not return several News-Press phone calls.

Three of the references listed on the e-mail to Ms. Murdoch did not return phone calls from the News-Press.

One of two others who confirmed that they knew Ms. Hulsey, Teresa Stroud, said she has been a close friend of the Hulsey family for 10 years. They were neighbors in Texas until Ms. Hulsey's family moved to Knapp Drive in Montecito, about a month before the collision.

Ms. Stroud called Ms. Hulsey a "good person" and "responsible girl."

"I understand the tragedy that has happened and it's just terrible," she said. "But Heather is innocent until proven guilty.

"I'm not belittling this tragedy at all, but if you have a wreck on the road, you don't stop driving," Ms. Stroud added. "She's trying to earn a living while she's trying to continue her education."

The e-mail response to the ad states that Ms. Hulsey is attending Santa Barbara City College and UCSB, where she is a cheerleader.

Initially, Ms. Murdoch said she was reluctant to alert the Shlensky family about the e-mail -- concerned it would cause more pain -- but then decided they deserved to know.

Evely Laser Shlensky, Dr. Shlensky's wife of 44 years, was shocked by the news.

"Making a living and misrepresenting that you are a safe driver are two different things," she said.

"I understand she needs to support herself while awaiting the outcome of this case. But for her to represent herself as a person with a clean driving record, given the charges against her, I find it absolutely frightening."

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