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## Yacht owned by Jeffrey Epstein's brother was donated to a Charleston marine science group

BY CHLOE JOHNSON CJOHNSON@POSTANDCOURIER.COM

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This 80-foot yacht, donated to a Charleston marine science group, was given by Mark Epstein, the brother of convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. Rusty Day/Provided

When a wealthy donor from New York City put word out he was giving away an 80-foot yacht, Rusty Day jumped at the opportunity.

The announcement was made on an email listserv for marine science organizations, and Day had been leading Charleston's Marine Science and Nautical Training Academy — MANTA for short — for the past decade.

To him, the boat was a perfect opportunity for the small nonprofit to get its own research vessel. So he put in an application.

"They evaluated dozens and dozens of marine science organizations, from Rockefeller

(University) to the Sea Turtle Conservation Society, a bunch of big ones," Day said. "The Smithsonian also asked for the boat. He ended up selecting MANTA out of the whole lot."

"He," in this case, was Mark Epstein, brother of Jeffrey Epstein, the convicted sex offender who was in Manhattan pre-trial detention Saturday facing a slate of new charges when officials announced he apparently committed suicide.



NEWS

Jeffrey Epstein died by suicide in NY jail ahead of sex-trafficking charges trial

BY JIM MUSTIAN ASSOCIATED PRESS

Day's organization leads trips for high school and college students to study Caribbean coral reefs. He had no idea about Mark Epstein's family connection until recent news coverage pointed it out, Day said, and said his group never had any contact with Jeffrey Epstein.

"I'm sort of squirming and cringing at the idea of now being somehow linked to all this," Day said. "It's not a very nice situation for a nonprofit to be in."

The boat donation was highlighted in a recent [Wall Street Journal report](#) tracing Mark Epstein's finances and the possible connections to his brother. The yacht, which Epstein had named the Izmo, was cited as one example of a valuable asset that was at one point listed for sale at \$990,000.

Epstein told the Journal he didn't want to discuss his finances, but he called The Post and Courier back on Tuesday because he said he didn't want MANTA to be smeared.

Among the many organizations who asked for the vessel, he said, some already had watercraft and others would have just re-sold the yacht for cash.

"I realized if I gave the boat to MANTA, it would be a game-changer for them," Epstein said.

The yacht, which sleeps at least nine, was built in 1971 and has a teak-lined deck and cockpit. Epstein originally bought the boat by himself around 2000, he said, and kept it as a pleasure craft for the next 18 years. But he wanted a new vessel and needed to stop paying for insurance and upkeep on the Izmo.

Selling the yacht, much like selling a classic car, took a long time, Epstein said. Finally, he reached out to a friend who worked in marine science. She published the offer of the boat donation in July of last year, according to an email provided by Day.

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Epstein said he'd never met Day or heard of MANTA before they applied, but that he respected the organization's mission.

Meanwhile, Day had just quit a federal research position based out of the Hollings Marine Laboratory so he could spend his time growing MANTA. He's still an adjunct at the College of Charleston, and leads a summer class affiliated with the nonprofit that takes students to the Caribbean.

"That was a big risk I took and a big step I took ... trying to grow the organization, and right after I did that, this yacht donation comes along," Day said.

Epstein also donated \$20,000 to help refit the boat as a research vessel and has given MANTA smaller sums of money since then to help with odd repairs, Day said.

The opportunity seemed like "the universe rewarded me," said Day, who said the boat is in Charleston but declined to identify exactly where it is berthed.

He said many students had told him they were eager to join the marine science world after participating in field work with MANTA and that the yacht would only help bolster that mission.

But now he worried that the connection to the Epstein family might damage the organization he'd quit a job to grow.

"I don't have the resources to research (donors') connections to all their relatives, to figure out if these people are connected to people who have done unscrupulous things," Day said.

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## **CHLOE JOHNSON**

Chloe Johnson was the editor for the Health and Environment team and wrote about South Carolina's changing climate. Her work has been recognized by the Society for Features Journalism, the Scripps Howard Foundation and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize.