

The Talented Mr. Epstein; Lately, Jeffrey Epstein's high-ying style has been drawing oohs and aahs: the bachelor nancier lives in New York's largest private residence, claims to take only billionaires as clients, and ies celebrities including Bill Clinton and Kevin Spacey on his Boeing 727. But pierce his air of mystery and the picture changes. VICKY WARD explores Epstein's investment career, his ties to retail magnate Leslie Wexner, and his complicated past Vanity Fair March 2003

Q: Do you have any expectation of participating in any business venture with Mr. Cayne?

A: No.

Q: Have you had any business participations with Mr. Theram?

A: No; nor do I anticipate any.

Q: Mr. Epstein, did anyone at Bear Stearns tell you in words or substance that you should not divulge anything about St. Joe Minerals to the staff of the Securities and Exchange Commission?

A: No.

Q: Has anyone indicated to you in any way, either directly or indirectly, in words or substance, that your compensation for this past year or any future monies coming to you from Bear Stearns will be contingent upon your not divulging information to the Securities and Exchange Commission?

A: No.

Despite the circumstances of Epstein's leaving, Bear Stearns agreed to pay him his annual bonus-which he anticipated as being approximately \$100,000.

The S.E.C. never brought any charges against anyone at Bear Stearns for insider trading in St. Joe, but its questioning seems to indicate that it was skeptical of Epstein's answers. Some sources have wondered why, if he was such a big producer at Bear Stearns, he would have given it up over a mere \$2,500 fine.

Certainly the years after Epstein left the firm were not obviously prosperous ones. His luck didn't seem to change until he met Hoffenberg.

One of Epstein's first assignments for Hoffenberg was to mastermind doomed bids to take over Pan American World Airways in 1987 and Emery Air Freight Corp. in 1988. Hoffenberg claimed in a 1993 hearing before a grand jury in Illinois that Epstein came up with the idea of financing these bids through Towers's acquisition of two ailing Illinois insurance companies, Associated Life and United Fire. "He was hired by us to work on the securities side of the insurance companies and Towers Financial, supposedly to make a profit for us and for the companies," Hoffenberg reportedly told the grand jury. He also alleged that Epstein was the "technician," executing the schemes, although, having no broker's license, he had to rely on others to make the trades. Much of Hoffenberg's subsequent testimony in his criminal case has proven to be false, and Epstein has claimed he was merely asked how the bids could be accomplished and has said he had nothing to do with the financing of them. Yet Richard Allen, the former treasurer of United Fire, recalls seeing Epstein two or three times at the company. He and another executive say they had direct dealing with Epstein over the finances. And in his deposition of 1989, Epstein stated that he was the one who executed "all" Hoffenberg's instructions to buy and sell the stock. He called it "making the orders." He could not recall whether he had chosen the brokers used.