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Kayak found, but Portsmouth man still missing

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PORTSMOUTH — Authorities believe they have located the kayak of a local man who went missing on July 18, but are still asking for the public's assistance in finding him.

Police Detective Rebecca Hester confirmed authorities on Saturday located what they believe is Eric James' green kayak at Odiorne State Park.

There is not an active search for James on the water, but the Coast Guard is working with Portsmouth and Rye police to find the 33-year-old Portsmouth resident.

James had been living with his mother on Orchard Street, but has not been seen since July 18.

Police say the kayak was found near a building at the Seacoast Science Center at Odiorne Point and noted James' bike was located locked to a pole near the kayak launch at the park. Police say there is no indication of foul play in his disappearance.

Hester said the kayak was found above the high-tide line indicating it was placed there and didn't wash ashore.

Darwin James, the missing man's older brother, feared his brother may be lost at sea and said the finding of his kayak with its paddle gives the family some hope.

"At least it means it's less likely he is in the water, so that's a relief," James said.

Rye police are working with Portsmouth authorities to locate James, who they consider missing and endangered because he suffers from mental illness.

Eric James' family has been searching for him for more than a week and filed a missing persons report with Portsmouth police on July 19.

Darwin James, who lives in Dover, last saw Eric on July 18 and on July 20 he located his brother's bike chained up near the kayak launch near Odiorne Point in Rye.

Family members say Eric James suffers from mental illness, having being diagnosed with bipolar disorder.

His mother said it was sometimes difficult to get him to take his medication.

Darwin said his brother had been upset about his dog's death and the recent loss of a job, which came after a car accident that took place when he reportedly fell asleep at the wheel.



Portsmouth Police Detective Rebecca Hester shows pictures of Eric James, who went missing on July 18, during a news conference Monday where they named his missing status as an endangered missing person. EJ Hersom/Staff photographer

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Eric had reportedly become very religious recently and attended church services at New Hope Baptist Church on Peverly Road.

Darwin said he was checking on his brother on July 18 when it appeared Eric was loading his kayak onto his vehicle. He said he took his brother's keys so he wouldn't drive and spent some time with him to make sure he was feeling better.

The family knew something was wrong when they couldn't locate him on July 19 and found out he hadn't gone to church.

The family later learned that Eric had sent a letter to the church's pastor that was "over-the-top religious," according to Darwin.

Darwin said Eric sent a check for \$2,012 to the church pastor along with the letter that thanked the reverend for "everything."

Eric's brother believes the check amount wasn't arbitrary and may reference the year 2012, which has been associated with the end of the world by some.

Police say a Rye police officer is believed to have spoken to Eric on Saturday night sometime around 9:30 p.m. when they found him wet and kneeling on the shore at Odiorne Point. A man believed to have been Eric told the officer he was taking a break from kayaking.

Family members say they have one lead that may confirm Eric was out on the water.

Darwin spoke to a person who was on a University of New Hampshire boat headed back from the Isle of Shoals and believes they may have encountered Eric on his kayak in the early evening as it was getting dark.

Darwin said the captain of the boat approached the kayaker and warned him of the dangers of going out on the ocean at night.

"The kayaker asked if they were Christians," Darwin said.

Hester and Rye Police Chief Kevin Walsh say they are hoping to garner leads from the many people who might have been at Odiorne on the weekend James disappeared. Police note that a wedding was being held at Odiorne Point on the night James was in the park.

The family is still hoping to find Eric and have been working with local police and the media to get word out so that people might report any sightings of the man.

"Our best tool is keeping people informed," Darwin James said.

Eric James is 5 feet 6 inches tall, weighs approximately 125 pounds and is 33 years old but is said to look much younger.

Anyone with information is asked to contact local law enforcement and call the Portsmouth Police Emergency Communications Center at 436-2145. Hester can be contacted through the detective division at 436-2511.



**EJ Hersom/Staff photographer
Portsmouth Detective Rebecca Hester asks for the public's help in finding Eric James, who went missing on July 18, during a news conference Monday where they named his missing status as an endangered missing person.**

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EJ Hersom/Staff photographer Portsmouth Police Detective Rebecca Hester holds pictures of Eric James, who went missing on July 18, during a news conference Monday where they named his missing status as an endangered missing person.



Eric James

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