

## What does it mean to be a shark conservation organization?

Every animal welfare organization is committed to a motto and tries to identify with it. This means a lot of responsibility, and quite often, the motto is far from what is ultimately achievable. Unfortunately, it happens more often than not that even if one has the heart in the right place, it is not enough to make an impact. *SharkSchool® Teaching* is essential and therefore committing to its motto “conservation through education,” we need to bring accurate information into schools. A big task, considering how much wrongful information on sharks floats around on TV, radio, books, and the internet. This means that accurate information can only stem from scientific-based literature or must be researched by comparing dependable sources. Shark protection and conservation take place on many levels, and each one aims for the same outcome: to guarantee the survival of sharks. It is understood that not every shark can be protected from all dangers. Still, it is essential to create the best knowledge base for the conservation of them as a group. *SharkSchool® Teaching* will conquer this challenge.

Board of Directors *SharkSchool® Teaching*

## A long journey...

In early 2006, I separated with a shark organization since I couldn't implement any of my ideas, and it became too frustrating. How can shark protection be successful, if you can't even succeed on a small level due to petty internal fighting? Several times, I proposed the idea to educate children directly at their schools and present the sharks in the most favorable light. By schools, I do not mean high school but elementary school level. The sobering statement from the president of the organization was that children bring no money and so my proposal went down the drain. Although the idea failed in German-speaking countries, it stayed on my mind and so I started my campaign in my hometown, the US, and it was a big success. To reach young children means that sharks are seen in the right light from early on and not how it was during my youth. The years passed and my teaching reached a level where I became more and more aware that one day I will no longer be able to cope with the amount of teaching on my own. I began to contemplate on ways to assure that my knowledge keeps reaching people, even without me since one day I will be too old to perform. I concluded that *SharkSchool®*, the company I created to operate on a professional level, needs to train independent teachers. The wheel did not have to be reinvented again, only put in a continuous motion without my doing. However, it needs to make sure that the expertise level of every teacher would be at par with the most accurate information. So my quality control must be impeccable.

## Junior shark researcher

Starting 2021, every SST junior member, who is at least 14 years old, can take part (accompanied by at least one parent) in a 1-week trial course in shark research with Erich Ritter in the Bahamas. He/she will be integrated directly into the research team. He/she can help to collect data and (more importantly) be among sharks.

## 1-week family course

In this entry course, junior members can get their open water diver's license and, at the same time, complete a shark course. Accompanying parents enjoy their (diving) holidays during the day while their kids are in training. Parents can also join shark lectures in the evening hours.

## Regional meetings

Regional meetings (1 to 2 times/year) will be organized where members can get to know each other and discuss new SST aspects. A lecture will also be given by an SST staff member.

## Intense weeks

The road to the instructor at SST is a rather long and exhausting one. Intensive 2-week workshops are offered every year, which allows a member to take up to four courses in this short time. It is further planned that courses such as “Interaction II” or “Rescue,” also to be held in the German-speaking area, as these courses do not necessarily require underwater exercises with sharks.

The answer was right in front of me, but it took me a long time to finally comprehend what the exact concept must look like. An organization needed to be created where each member and teacher would be given the competence to assert themselves against the so-called experts, as well as be given the freedom to follow their own initiative within the organization's boundaries and not be held back by any by-laws. The final construct was called *SharkSchool® Teaching*. Although the first attempts to establish the organization failed due to the lack of suitable people, this did not stop me from pursuing the idea. Finally, last year the right president, Andy Dellios, took over the helm. But even the most motivated president can only achieve as much as his board members are willing to contribute to help carry the torch. These members were found in former, highly motivated *SharkSchool®* graduates. Since then, only half a year has passed, but what has been achieved in this short period of time exceeded my highest expectations. An idea, born more than 14 years ago, finally got the platform I imagined. Erich Ritter

Do you have any questions, ideas, or suggestions? Please contact us at [info@sharkschool-teaching.org](mailto:info@sharkschool-teaching.org). Should you want to reach someone directly from the board:

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