

BRONX TIMES

VOL. 12 NO. 20 MAY 18, 2006

COMPLIMENTARY



Rocking the Boat founder and executive director Adam Green helps students from the non-profit organization's Boatbuilding program construct the backbone of a rowboat. PHOTO BY JOAQUIN COTTON/BFC See story on page 6

EXPLORING THE WATERS

Rocking the Boat teaches borough students how to build, navigate nautical vessels

INSIDE:

Woodlawn Rallies For Firehouse 4

Court Halts Hunts Point Development 19

Lehman College Athletics 38, 39

BRONX COUNTY'S LARGEST COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER GROUP

Serving: Castle Hill, Parkchester, Hunts Point, Fordham South, Grand Concourse, Fordham North, Bronx North, Co-op City

AL

EXPLORING THE WATERS:

BY BOBBY CIAFARDINI

At the heart of Mount Eden lies an oasis — a place where young travelers build boats and learn the necessary tools to explore the waterways of the Bronx.

From the quaint majesty of a Whitehall to the sleek craftsmanship of a Dory boat, Bronx students through the non-profit program Rocking the Boat assemble boats from scratch, the same kind commonly used by travelers during the 18th and 19th centuries, and then hit the city's waters like explorers past, to navigate their creations and investigate the splendor of nature's maritime.

Inside a 60 E. 147th Street storefront woodshop, Rocking the Boat — a traditional wooden boatbuilding and environmental education program — takes a hands-on and multi-faceted approach to education and youth development. The organization runs one of the most dynamic afterschool and summer programs in the city. Adam Green, who founded Rocking the Boat two years after graduating from college, said the organization's method of interconnecting every activity — building boats by hand, learning how to row and sail them, and using them to restore the Bronx and East rivers — enables Rocking the Boat to reach students at successively deeper levels.

"The idea behind our programs is to give kids a chance to do something special," said Green, the organization's executive director, standing inside the busy shop that

smells of cedar and oak, as students operate electric power saws, molding wood into the foundation for their ships. "Rocking the Boat gives teenagers a chance to stand out in their own minds, and the purpose of the program is to give kids a chance to know that they are important, but also gives them a chance to take part in something that works."

Green grew up in Manhattan and began volunteering at a junior high school in east Harlem during a semester off from Vassar College in 1995. At the school another teacher told Green of a dream he had of building a boat as a class project with students. The future Rocking the Boat founder would lead 10 youngsters in the construction of an 8-foot dinghy that they launched at the end of the semester in the school's swimming pool. Green, who although handy never worked on boats, decided it was a great idea and founded the organization in 1995. He moved Rocking the Boat to the Bronx in 1996 at Eugenio María de Hostos Community College. Green relocated the shop to Mount Eden in 1998 to New Settlement Apartments community center — where for three years it incubated before growing into its own non-profit — and has since built 17 ships with student participants at the storefront shop.

Today, the group is working on a Dory boat — a New England fishing boat — that, like the Whitehall boats, seats four, and is scheduled for completion by the end of the 13-week semester. Rocking the Boat serves more than 700 young people annually. All

students are eligible to receive a variety of academic credits, including math, science, technology, physical education, and community service credit at their high schools with their successful completion of the program.

Rocking the Boat is currently accepting applications for fall 2006. The application process requires a commitment from students, teachers and schools to complete the programs and to work collaboratively with the organization's educators to develop curriculum that relates to its classwork. Programs are free for students.

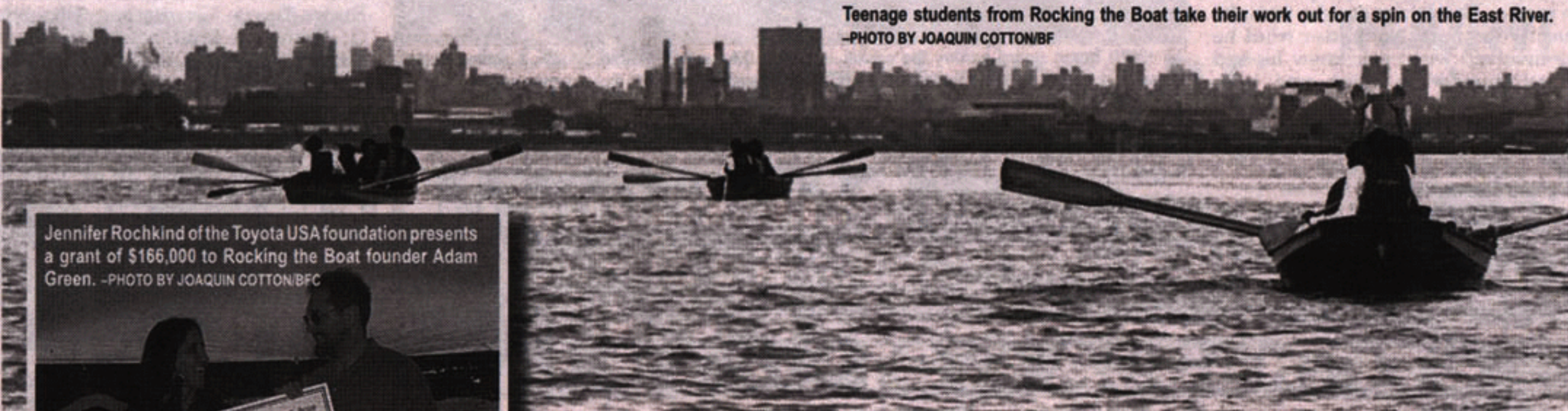
"Being part of Rocking the Boat is one of the greatest feelings in the world," said Green, holding his cat, appropriately named Woody, who ambles around the shop while students hone the craft of boat building. "This organization allows us to connect to young people and their families in the Bronx, and our kids are able to apply what they've learned. That's most important, because many times what students learn in textbooks is forgotten. Here material is digested and explored."

The organization runs three primary programs, including Traditional Wooden Boatbuilding, the Bronx River On-Water Education Program and the Community On-Water Program. Boatbuilding is at the core of Rocking the Boat's work with inner-city youth and "is a powerful tool for building self-confidence and learning about self," Green says. Since August 1998, over 225

students from more than 20 different high schools have been involved in building traditional wooden boats.

Each semester-long Boatbuilding class is divided into two sections each of eight students. They work together in the shop, and during the summer, all students are paid a stipend of \$575 to work 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Thursday for seven weeks. Without any previous woodworking experience, students build a full size traditional wooden boat from scratch. They start from architectural drawings, transfer the layout to wood, and create the entire backbone of the vessel before planking, framing and painting. Some designs include a Cape Cod Oyster Skiff, a bateau, and a colonial river ferry. Last spring, the team of students worked to build a sailboat.

Green is a self-taught ship builder himself and his students have embraced his passion for crafting. Eddie Roman, a Rocking the Boat student since fall 2000, is pursuing a career in carpentry. The Walton Avenue resident became part of the program at age 14 and continued through his years at Alfred E. Smith High School. Now 20, Roman has progressed from a student apprentice to an apprentice to a senior shop apprentice. "If it wasn't for this program, I would probably be out on the streets getting involved in things I shouldn't," Roman said. "Rocking the Boat helped me become a better student in school. It improved my focus and grades, and prepared me better for the challenges

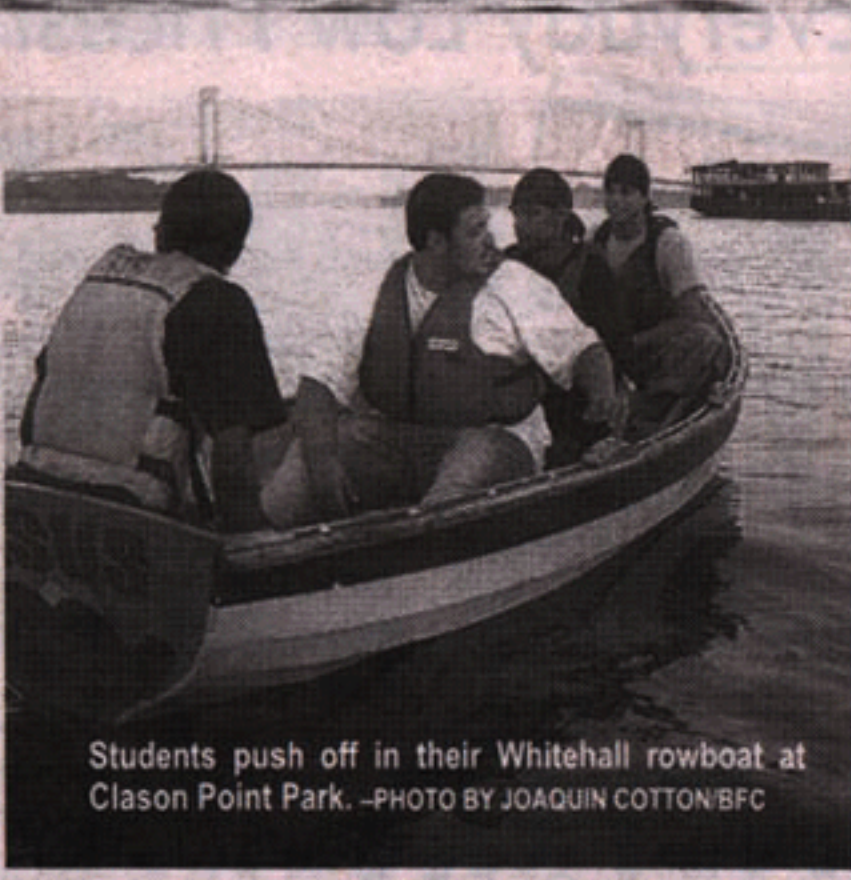


Teenage students from Rocking the Boat take their work out for a spin on the East River. —PHOTO BY JOAQUIN COTTON/BFC

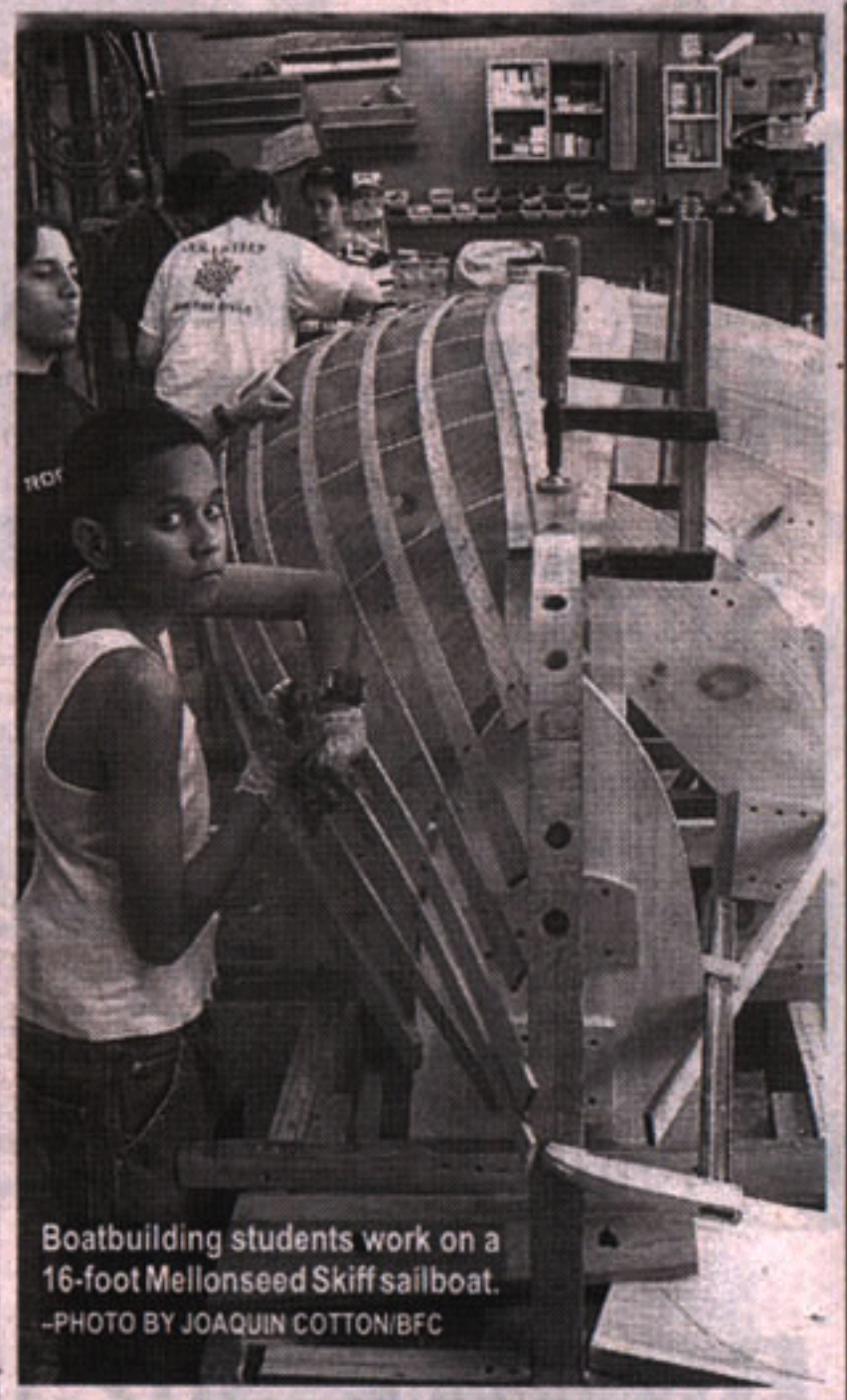
Jennifer Rochkind of the Toyota USA foundation presents a grant of \$166,000 to Rocking the Boat founder Adam Green. —PHOTO BY JOAQUIN COTTON/BFC



Rocking the Boat student apprentices prepare boats at Clason Point Park before they hit the city's waterways. —PHOTO BY JOAQUIN COTTON/BFC



Students push off in their Whitehall rowboat at Clason Point Park. —PHOTO BY JOAQUIN COTTON/BFC



Boatbuilding students work on a 16-foot Mellonseed Skiff sailboat. —PHOTO BY JOAQUIN COTTON/BFC

Rocking the Boat teaches borough students how to build, navigate nautical vessels

ahead. This is a great program — there is nothing like it.

"It's opened my horizons," he added. "The greatest aspect of the program is when you complete the project. The feeling I get when the boat is finished is indescribable. It's a great sense of accomplishment."

The On-Water Education program grew out of the Boatbuilding program and is now equally as empowering and integral to Rocking the Boat's mission of helping youth become strong, caring, responsible adults. Each semester-long On-Water class is divided into two sections of ten students each. They work together on the banks of the East River and Bronx River a few times a week during the school year.

All students involved in the program are also paid a stipend of \$575 to work from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Thursday for seven weeks during the summer. For one half of the course, students learn and practice maritime skills such as boat handling, traditional and modern navigation techniques, and are trained in CPR/First Aid. The other half is devoted to Habitat Monitoring and Restoration—understanding the natural environment of upper New York Harbor and working to restore its habitats by

implementing projects in partnership with a range of professional scientists.

Among many Bronx River restoration projects, students are responsible for planting beds of Spartina grasses, which help to filter the water and create a habitat for young fish, and mapping different aspects of riverbed topography in order to paint a comprehensive picture of the Bronx River. Back in the woodshop, Green has also created a tidal estuary tank that mimics the fresh-water and salt-water mix found in the Bronx River habitat. The tank was created with the help of local scientists and is another example of a tool the organization uses to teach students about the environment.

By using the wooden boats built by Boatbuilders, the On-Water students are able to explore various waterways and perform data collection and restoration work that could not be done from land. The On-Water program is based out of its own Riverside field site at Clason Point Park at the end of Soundview Avenue.

The Community On-Water Program is an expansion of Rocking the Boat's On-Water Program. The program dramatically increases the number of young people who are able to benefit from Rocking the Boat's

resources. The program's classes emphasize a sustained impact on public school students.

In addition, teachers are encouraged to enroll their students in multiple day programs, allowing them the opportunity to experience the Bronx River over time, from different perspectives. Green said the sustained nature of the program — which runs during school hours as an integral part of school — makes it more likely that the Bronx River will become a more tangible part of each student's daily life. Offered to any high school class free of charge, the Community On-Water program has served over 2,000 students since its inception and each program accommodates up to 25 participants, including teachers and chaperones.

"Whether it's the Boatbuilding, the maritime skills, or the environmental project, the students are learning skills and responsibilities that will prepare them for the future," said Tony Archino, director of On-Water programming for Rocking the Boat. "The kids involved in our On-Water programs are seeing real results before their eyes, and that's why the project has been so successful."

The non-profit organization survives through generous contributions from supporters. Funding sources include federal and New York City government agencies, private foundations, corporations, and

individuals. Recently, Rocking the Boat was named the recipient of a \$166,000 grant from the Toyota USA Foundation. The grant will help support the expansion of Rocking the Boat's Community On-Water Program.

"We felt that Rocking the Boat was a great grassroots program, with a particularly unique approach to science and environmental education. Our hope is that this grant will support their Community On-Water program, which takes students' classroom science curriculum and allows them to apply it through hands-on experiences in the real world," said Patricia Pineda, group vice president of Toyota Motor North America.

"Toyota is also committed to diversity and inclusion and directs a percentage of our philanthropic giving to programs that serve diverse communities, like Rocking the Boat in the Bronx," she continued. "Also, with more than 38% of Bronx households having children under 18, Rocking the Boat's programs will be extremely beneficial, not only in helping students build their science education skills, but also in expanding their personal horizons."

Eighteen-year-old Maurisa Hunte, an On-Water senior apprentice, said Rocking the Boat opens up opportunities for teens across the city and in the Bronx. "It's a place where we can learn and have fun," she said. "That's a big part of the program. I've gained many friendships through Rocking the Boat and met people of all different cultures and backgrounds. The staff is very supportive and I love being a part of its programs."

Ellyias Carter, 21, a Macombs Road resident who has been involved with Rocking the Boat for nearly six years, said the program has sharpened his technical skills, but most importantly sharpened his mind. "I'm pursuing a career as an aviation mechanic and when I leave Rocking the Boat I'm definitely going to miss this place," Carter said. "I'll never forget the programs. I've met many people here and Rocking the Boat helped me grow throughout the years."

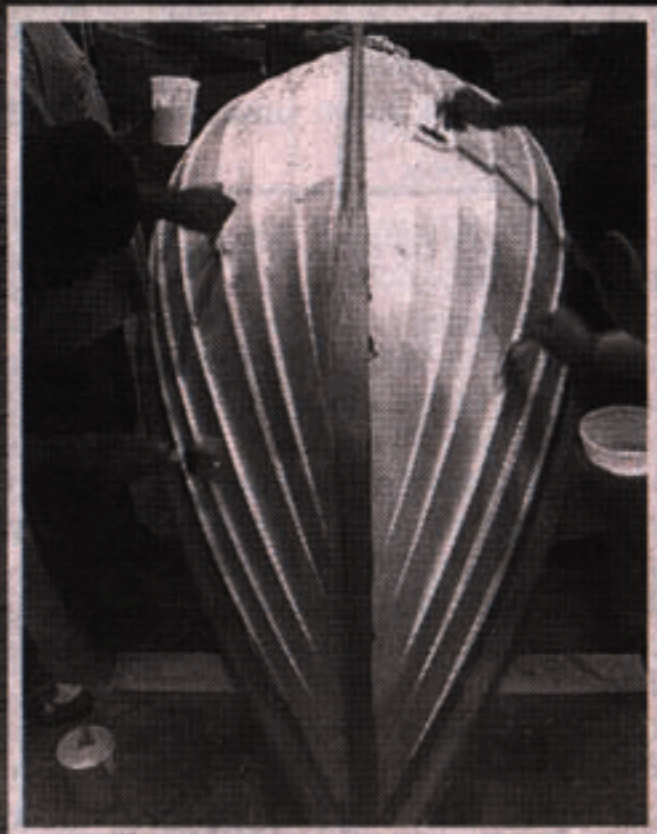
The program has planned an end of semester celebration, open to the community, on Saturday, June 10, from 12 to 4 p.m. at Clason Point Park. For more information on Rocking the Boat, visit www.rockingtheboat.org, or call the Mount Eden woodshop at (718) 466-5799.



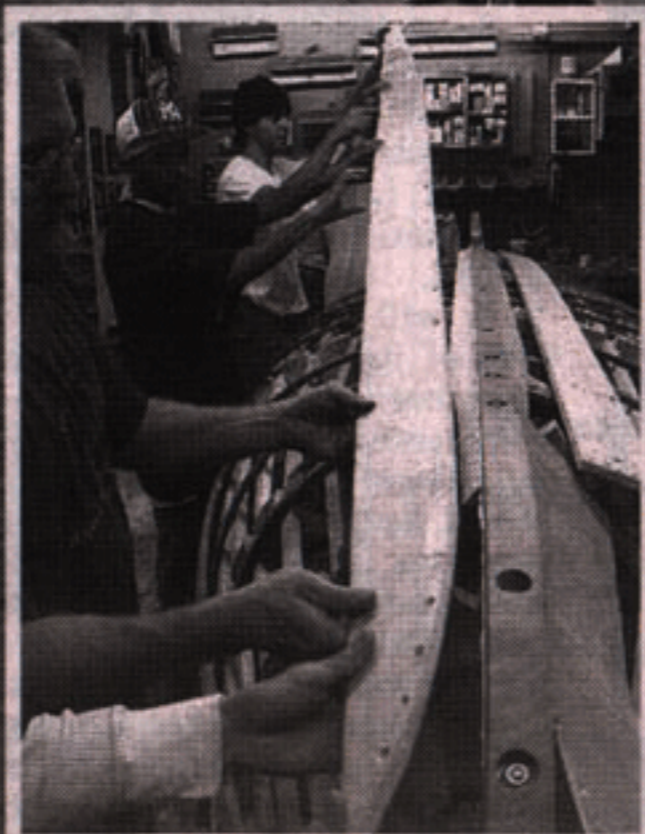
A launch day event was held on the Bronx River, commemorating the completion of Rocking the Boat's latest work. —PHOTO BY JOAQUIN COTTON/BFC



Borough President Adolfo Carrion, Jr. and Bronx Parks Commissioner Hector Aponte join Green and Rockkind at the check presentation. —PHOTO BY JOAQUIN COTTON/BFC



Boatbuilding participants apply the first coat of paint to their masterpiece. —PHOTO BY JOAQUIN COTTON/BFC



Green and students fit the first plank on a 14-foot rowboat. —PHOTO BY JOAQUIN COTTON/BFC

Rowing on the Bronx River is one of the many opportunities for students of Rocking the Boat programs. —PHOTO BY JOAQUIN COTTON/BFC