

RPC Thrift Shop Rocks

By Nonie Reich

The Rye Presbyterian Church Women's Association took a field trip last week to Rocking the Boat on Hunt's Point in the Bronx. There they visited with Adam Green and saw his organization, one of their 31 grant recipients funded by the RPC Thrift Shop, at work.

Through a variety of classroom and on-water programs, Rocking the Boat helps at-risk New York City youths to become empowered and responsible adults. The boatyard is a half-acre facility wedged between the city's largest scrap metal recycling yard and the Hunts Point Market (where every bit of meat, fish and produce enters the city).

We began by touring the storage lockers where small rowboats and sailboats, about 16 feet long, sit quietly before the teens arrive for afternoon classes. The boats have names like *Triumph*, *Tenacity*, *Momentum*,

and *Phoenix*. Rocking the Boat developed from Green's interest in experience-based learning; his organization teaches life skills through the skills needed in boat building.

Yamina and Tori, our assistant guides, have worked at Rocking the Boat for over two years, having been program participants themselves. They are examples of the effort made by the organization to transition kids from the program to the work world. They smoothly set the boats on the water; our feeble attempts to assist went largely unnoticed.

Our group split into three boats, rowing against a flooding tide. The water was much cleaner than expected. For the first time in 300 years, a species of fish known as Alewife has returned home thanks to reintroduction by the New York City Parks Department, relying on the help of Rocking the Boat students to test water and release fish. Not only are invasive



Phragmites weeded out by students, but a delicate species of native grass known as *Spartina* is now seen sprinkled along the river banks, a lovely detail against the blocks of housing projects on the horizon.

We ate lunch under a tent in the boatyard and listened as Adam discussed a variety of topics, including funding sources. In this economic climate, Rocking the Boat is particularly thankful for the Thrift Shop grant which will help pay for a summer adventure trip for 50 teens. They will spend ten days in student-built boats camping along an 80-mile stretch of the Hudson River.

As his organization has grown, so has Green's awareness of how

new services are needed. In 2004, Rocking the Boat welcomed its first social worker on staff to help in situations where a promising teen has difficulty, perhaps with coping due to abuse at home. In cases where high school has become a formula for failure, Green might suggest that the teen get a GED and move on with his life. A large majority of his 500 hundred students have gone on to college, many of them to local community colleges, and others to John Jay College of Criminal Justice and to the SUNY Maritime College. Rocking the Boat now has 11 full-time and 10 part-time staff (all former students) serving over 2,000 community members per year.

As he contemplates the future, Green presses the need to generate increased commercial income from entrepreneurial activities involving the boating community, including commissions to build wooden boats and taking groups out on the river.

Heading home, our group felt we'd seen God's hand at work and had met someone extraordinary. We wish him and Rocking the Boat good luck and Godspeed.

The RPC Women's Association will host its Annual Garden Party and Grant Awards Lunch June 8 from 11:30 a.m.- 2 p.m. We'll be awarding grants to organizations near and far, including Rocking the Boat.



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