



Christopher Kautz (c.), boat-building program director of Rocking the Boat, stands with students.

Teens getting shipshape

BY BILL EGBERT

AN INNOVATIVE BRONX youth program that promotes environmental awareness will be getting some green from the federal government, thanks to the efforts of two local congressmen.

Rocking the Boat, an environmental education organization based in the South Bronx, will receive a \$35,000 grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, secured by newly powerful Reps. José Serrano (D-South Bronx) and Joseph Crowley (D-Bronx/Queens).

The program teaches high school students how to build — from scratch — 14-foot-long Whitehall rowing boats, a process that takes about a semester. After a boat is finished, the builders launch them into the Bronx River, where they learn how to monitor native wildlife, even doing research for city agencies and local colleges.

"Rocking the Boat is a great program for many

Eco-boat program gets a 35G boost

reasons, but foremost among them is its success in achieving its mission of education and hands-on environmental restoration work," said Serrano.

In addition to building the boats and monitoring Bronx River wildlife, the students train to act as river guides to help other Bronx residents explore the local waters.

With more than 200 students a year participating in the program, founder Adam Green estimates that Rocking the Boat introduces more than a thousand people a year to the waters around the Bronx. "This recognition and federal support mean a lot," he said.

"This program provides Bronx students the opportunity of a lifetime to learn about the environment and enjoy the outdoors in a completely unique and important way," said Crowley, a member of the Democratic House leadership.

Serrano and Crowley have both been longtime patrons of the youth program and its mission of education and support for environmental restoration.

In 2001, Serrano helped a local group secure a 30,000-square-foot site on the Bronx River that now houses Rocking the Boat's environmental training and on-water components.

With this new funding from EPA, Rocking the Boat will initiate two programs for New York City high school students focusing on the Bronx and East rivers.

The grant to Rocking the Boat was the largest awarded by the EPA this year in New York as part of its "environmental education" grants program.

wegbert@nydailynews.com