

# Program builds boats & responsible teens

BY SONDRA WOLFER

MAYBE YOU could call it Santa's water sleigh.

Just in time for the holidays, a 14-foot rowboat built from scratch by students hit the Bronx River in Hunts Point Friday evening to the cheers of crowds on shore.

Named the Night Owl, the craft is the 29th boat built through Rocking the Boat, a Bronx nonprofit organization that teaches young people boat construction and environmental and maritime education to foster self-confidence, teamwork and life skills.

"The kids learn, 'If I can build a boat, I can do anything,'" said Adam Green, the program's founder and executive director. "That feeling of pride is going to carry over into so many areas."

During each 13-week semester, 16 students turn a large pile of wooden planks into a boat. The planks are made malleable through steam heat, or a blowtorch and water spray, and slowly molded into the streamlined shape of the boat's design.

The program mainly builds Whitehalls, like the Night Owl, which were the most

common small craft in New York Harbor in the 18th and early 19th centuries. But students also have built skiffs, a Colonial river ferry and a bateau, a flat-bottomed boat. The boats' seats and oars also are handcrafted.

Students decided to outfit the Night Owl with lights after a fall environmental excursion returned after dark and the rowers had visibility problems.

The community launch celebration included a viewing of the organization's new 6,000-square-foot boatbuilding shop, which will open in the new year and includes offices and classrooms where students will receive education in environmental research and Bronx River restoration efforts. It is the first time the 10-year-old nonprofit will have all its programs under one roof.

Rocking the Boat's apprenticeships, résumé-writing support and social-work programs encourage students to attend college, trade schools and examine careers they may never have considered.

"Our goal is to help young people to identify their dreams and to follow them," Green said.

The Night Owl is the third boat Jennifer Rios has helped build with Rocking the Boat.

"The best part is seeing the progress," said Rios, 17. "You can't wait until the boat is afloat. You feel like you really accomplished something. I'm really proud about how it came out."

Before joining the program, Rios said,



**A student in nonprofit Rocking the Boat's program gives the rowboat Night Owl a final once-over before its maiden voyage on the Bronx River.** Photo by Enid Alvarez

she was bored and wasn't interested in much, including school. But she said building boats, earning a leadership position and working with counselors at school has changed her outlook and goals.

"I didn't care about stuff," she said. "Now I'm actually going to finish school and go to college."