



Christopher Kautz, front right, of Rock the Boat, and students lead Essence craft to the Bronx River.

## Teens 'sea' opportunity in boat program

BY NOAH FOWLE

AFTER A SEMESTER'S WORTH of sanding, measuring and cutting, Adam Green watched as his students launched the 19th boat in the fleet of his non-profit after-school program Rock the Boat earlier this month, and knew that this was just the beginning.

Since 1996, Green has given students an opportunity to develop carpentry skills, build confidence as mariners on the water and instructed them on local environmental issues in order to clean up and advocate for the Bronx River.

Once the seaworthy crafts are built — from scratch — students learn to row them and then venture out to monitor the different life native to the river, fulfilling various research contracts with the city's Environmental Protection Agency and local colleges.

"Our goals are very direct," he said. "We are planting more species in the river, and cleaning it up. And now, Bronx residents have access to go out on the water and use it as their own playground."

In addition to providing students with an array of skills, Green's program also allows for them to act as guides for other Bronx residents on the water.

With more than 200 high schools students participating citywide each year, Green estimates that the program has introduced more than a thousand people a year to the water.

"The first step is just to get people aware of the resources that are available to them," he said.

Irene Dominguez, a former student of the program, led her students through the design, construction, and the christening of the 14-foot Essence.

Before joining the program in 2000, Dominguez

had not even been aware the Bronx River existed. Now, the 21-year-old has become an outspoken advocate against pollution and is studying environmental science at SUNY Purchase.

"The program does not just build boats, it builds kids," she said. "The students become the voice of the organization."

For many students, the program is an eye-opener.

Franchely Blanco, a 17-year-old student at the Bronx Aerospace Academy High School, admitted that he used to be afraid of the water. But already in his second semester with the program, much of that has changed.

"It's cool. I'm out on the water, getting a little workout and learning what's really going on," he said. "I see what pollution does to our community and environment."