

The Social Entrepreneur

Adam Green '96



Using the principles of business to make positive change in the world.

Look to your right. Look out there. Remove that turret and you could be on any river in any wilderness park in America,” says **Adam Green '96**.

In the heart of Hunts Point, in the middle of the Bronx, on a hot September afternoon, Green is seeing things others can't exactly. But that might be his greatest strength.

Ten years ago, on a garbage-strewn parcel of Bronx riverfront between a recycling yard and an industrial market—blocks from the tractor-trailer littered Bruckner Expressway and three major city sewage plants—Green envisioned a garage where local kids could build boats and then sail them. That vision has become Rocking the Boat, a community boatbuilding organization—on the banks of a now green, egret-filled waterway. The orga-

nization not only teaches more than 3,000 high school students per year professional-grade wooden boatbuilding and environmental stewardship, but also provides local industry and researchers with a sustainable workforce to launch and maintain projects that breathe new life into the area's ecology and economy.

Green is the quintessential social entrepreneur—one who uses the principles of entrepreneurship to create social change, who measures success by the positive impact an endeavor has on the communities it serves.

“What we have here in the South Bronx is actually an incredible opportunity; we have one of the greatest natural



resources in the city to help lift up one of the poorest communities in the country,” says Green, the tireless executive director of Rocking the Boat. “Our goal is to match kids with learning programs and real work that build something beyond their own experience.”

Along with a coterie of other local organizations, such as Sustainable South Bronx, Partnerships for Parks, and the Bronx River Alliance, Green has embarked on what could be a life-long renaissance campaign for the South Bronx. Already Rocking the Boat has a number of projects that are permanently transforming the area—once blighted with the ugly marks of heavy industry—into a hub of social enterprise.

Last year, Rocking the Boat environmental apprentices, along with biologists from the NOAA Milford Laboratory, UConn Stamford, SUNY Purchase, and Pemaquid Mussels and Oysters, constructed the Bronx River’s first water-filtering mussel and seaweed reef. It was designed to address the outflow of the Hunts Point Wastewater Treatment Plant at the mouth of the Bronx River. The Bronx River Mussel and Seaweed Biofiltration project will help determine whether seaweed and mussels—organisms that thrive on the nutrients in wastewater—are a sustainable crop and filtration device for the Bronx River.

This season, Rocking the Boat will continue to build upon and main-

tain a \$350,000 wetland that processes and cleans the runoff from the 30,000-square-foot parking lot of its Bronx River neighbor, ABC Carpet & Home. Boatbuilding apprentices will also construct a 29-foot-long whaleboat reproduction for the Mystic Seaport Museum, and then sail it 120 miles to Mystic, Connecticut, next summer. It will be parked aboard the *Charles W. Morgan*—the last great wooden whaling ship in the United States.

All of this surpasses any expectation Green had when he launched the idea for Rocking the Boat while leading 10 East Harlem junior high students in the building of an eight-foot dinghy during a semester off from Vassar in 1995. After

teaching in the New York City school system for three years and developing his own boatbuilding and grant-writing skills, Green brought the operation to the New Settlement Apartments community center, where the boatbuilding and environmental education after-school programs incubated before the organization grew into its current space and staff size. Rocking the Boat now employs 12 people in full-time teaching and administrative positions, including two social workers to oversee college preparatory and wellness programs, as well as 14 part-time workers and apprentices—all former students.

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Green, who has received an Echoing Green Fellowship (which funds projects by social entrepreneurs) and a Union Square Award for grassroots organizing (given by the Tides Center, which promotes social change), says perhaps taking a “retroactively ambitious” approach to Rocking the Boat development might have actually propelled the organization to its current height. “I resisted the big dream model—the ‘Where can we be in 10 years?’ approach—and concentrated on how can we keep the lights on while we do this great thing,” he says.

“I suppose there’s a constant baseline of anxiety you have to maintain in growth—we now have to worry about the money, too,” he says. But, “There always has to be a creative way of solving problems behind the business. That’s social entrepreneurship.” *Adrian Brune*

A Family Affair

Liz Kaplow '81 & Evan Jacobs '78

Spouses and PR execs concentrate on telling good stories... and staying out of each other's way.

From the beginning of her public relations career, **Liz Kaplow '81** has relied on storytelling to make her clients and their products come alive for consumers. So when Target came to New York City-based Kaplow a decade ago, she was in a quandary. How could she make the brand resonate when there wasn't a single Target store in Manhattan for media or potential customers to experience?

The answer: She created a Target pop-up (a temporary store) on board a ship at Chelsea Piers during the holidays.

“We not only had media go on the boat, we opened it up to consumers, so they could shop off the boat, too,” Kaplow recounts. “It created tremendous buzz and was a great way to make the ‘Expect More, Pay Less’ story that wasn’t in front of people come to life.”

The model is still effective: Kaplow recently helped to implement pop-up shops for Target during this year’s Fashion Week in Manhattan.

One of the leading independent consumer PR firms in the country, Kaplow Communications (kaplowpr.com) used a similar strategy when hired by Skype. To explain what was then a new way to connect, the agency told stories about a grandmother spending time with her grandchildren after dinner, a doctor making house calls, and an overseas veteran visiting with family—all via Skype.

“It became much more emotional for media to see the way technology was used in real life for real people,” she explains.

Kaplow, who’s CEO and president of the 75-person company, founded the firm in 1991 to have more flexibility while raising her two daughters, now ages 21 and 25. In 1995, husband **Evan Jacobs '78**,