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DEIRDRE FLEMING

Setting new direction at Compass

For six years, middle school and high school students have been learning to build boats in the Compass Project. Now, new boats are being commissioned there.

The Portland nonprofit program has grown in public awareness through its three-day boat-building festival that takes place in Monument Square each July.

And through word-of-mouth, the skills, products and pride that have developed in the Compass Project warehouse are getting known.

But for the first time this spring, three commissioned boats have been launched by the program, which works with at-risk youth.

The program turned out a 16-foot Gloucester Light dory, a 16-foot Mackerel dory and a 12-foot Francis Kinney dory for three boaters who asked specifically for the vessels.

Clint Chase, boat-building project manager for Project Compass, said when the children in the program travel to boatyards or boat shows, the key information they glean from boat builders is the relationship the builders develop with each buyer.

But up until now, that piece of Maine's boat-building heritage had been missing from the Compass Project.

Chase said they hope to attract more buyers and keep commissioned work a part of the program.

"It brings a sense of realism to their work if the boat is actually commissioned," Chase said. "From the kids' perspective, when they've met the owner, they don't want the boat to sink."

Carrie Camann saw an article in "The Working Waterfront" about the Compass Project and decided her first boat would be built by the youths.

She said the experience of watching her 16-foot dory become a reality surpassed her expectations.

"Week by week, I watched it develop and the relationships develop... and I connected with all the people who helped build the boat," said Camann, who paid \$2,500 for her dory. "Hopefully, they'll find time to help me row it. They all have an invitation."

Blas Bruno of Blue Hill came to his Compass Project rowboat a different way.

Bruno wanted a rowboat for his daughter like the one he had at age 15. He figured the Compass Project would be a good deal for a simple boat.

The boats made in the program range in price from the simplest, most basic 12-foot skiffs, which can cost \$850, to 20-foot dories that sell for between \$4,000 and \$6,000, which, depending on the style, can still be a bargain price, Chase said.

The dories and skiffs are all plywood and epoxy, which Chase said means they are seaworthy while being easy to care for.

"Just keep paint on them. There is no maintenance," he said.

However, Bruno said he got more than his money's worth for his inexpensive boat.

"I was really surprised at the quality of the workmanship. It's quite high. Remarkably high. I would say it is almost professional," said Bruno, a boater of 35 years.

"And they are taking kids that are at a critical point, at a period of time when I think it's important they are focused on something really positive.

If you lose kids when they are in eighth grade, how are you going to get them back? I think a lot of times, you don't.

"I don't see how the kids could feel anything but pride. Now I've gotten friends who are very interested."

Chase hopes to have seven boats commissioned during the next school year, when youths from as many as 12 schools will work on boats at Compass Project.

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COMPASS PROJECT

TO LEARN MORE, go to www.compassproject.org, or visit the Compass Project at their boat-building festival July 13-15 in Portland's Monument Square on Congress Street in the Old Port.



The Compass Project plans to expand its horizons to work on commissioned boats. "From the kids' perspective, when they've met the owner, they don't want the boat to sink," says project manager Clint Chase.