

# Building boats helps dreams set sail for urban students

BY KEVIN CALLAHAN • COURIER-POST STAFF • APRIL 15, 2010



UrbanPromise School student Tatiana Davis, 12, of Camden, sands down a wooden sailboat she is helping build at the Camden Shipyard & Maritime Museum in the city. Davis was taking part in an after-school program. (Photos by FAYE MURMAN/Courier-Post)

**CAMDEN** — Holding a paper chili cup, Shakyra Howell was asked to bring over "the soup" to the boats.

The 13-year-old student who attends the UrbanPromise School in East Camden smiled and then she said, "it is epoxy."

Shakyra is among 10 middle school students in the Urban Promise Waterfront South After School Program who are building two wooden sailboats in the basement of the Camden Shipyard & Maritime Museum on Broadway in South Camden.

"I know if I can build a boat, if I have enough patience with this, I will have enough patience with anything," said Shakyra, a Camden resident who wants to be a forensic scientist.

Tatiana Davis, another student at UrbanPromise, also said she felt this fun afterschool project will help her. She plans on becoming a neonatologist.

"I like that this new experience will give me great opportunities when I am older," said Tatiana, a 12-year-old from Camden.

Last August, the afterschool program built three wooden rowboats and launched Faith, Hope and Promise into the Cooper River.

"That was our first venture into boat building," said Jim Cummings, director of UrbanTrekks, an outdoor program of UrbanPromise.

It took six weeks of labor for six teens from this faith-based organization's UrbanTrekks program to build the three 12-foot-long rowboats.

"The kids worked from blueprints and they cut the plywood for the boats," Cummings said.

Now the students are building the two sailboats from kits. The 15-foot boats are double-ended with a single sail in the middle. The boats are made of marine mahogany plywood.

The 10 students -- nine seventh- and eighth-graders and one sixth-grader -- started the project in early October. They work in split shifts with five building on Monday and the other five building on Wednesday.

The boats are scheduled to be launched on July 10 at the Cooper River Yacht Club. Before the students sail the boats, they will attend an eight-day sailing class on the Cooper River.

Throughout the winter, the students -- six girls and four boys -- have been going to a classroom session on sailing every Tuesday.

"They built little models and they race them down the rain gutters," Cummings said. "It helps them with the terminology of sailing and what are the different components of the sail."

The students have also been attending swim classes at the Boys and Girls Club in East Camden.

"We are consistently working as a team," said Bob Lehman, 62, a Haddonfield lawyer and one of four mentors for the students as they build the boats.

Charleston Clark, 12, a seventh-grader from Pennsauken, said he always wanted to own a boat one day.

"I still dream about that," Charleston said, taking a break from working on one of the boats. "I still hope my dream comes true."

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UrbanPromise School student Shakyra Howell, 13, of Camden, patches small holes in the boat she is helping build in Camden with the Urban BoatWorks group. (FAYE MURMAN/Courier-Post)