

## Boston families build boats, ties with waterfront

By Anna Badkhen  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

BOSTON — As soon as friends lowered Carol Shearer-Best's skiff into the murky water of Fort Point Channel, her son, Ayinde, 8, scooted to the freshly painted bow. Her daughter, Zenzele, 13, took her place at the stern. Uncertainly, Shearer-Best sat down, clutched the oars, exhaled loudly, and set off on the maiden voyage of the boat she and her children had built with their own hands.

The Shearer-Bests and five other teams spent July and August building wooden skiffs as part of a project to bring city families to the waterfront.

Yesterday, they launched four of them for the first time. None of the participants had ever built a boat before. Most of them had never rowed one.

"You've rowed before, right, mama?" Ayinde called to his mother.

"Once, in high school," replied Shearer-Best, a physical therapist assistant from Roxbury, as she maneuvered the 10-foot boat in the narrow waterway near the Evelyn Moakley Bridge. "About 30 years ago."

John Rowse, a fifth-grade teacher from Jamaica Plain and an amateur boat builder, organized the program, which he named Boston Family Boatbuilding.

"The whole deal was to get families who have never been on the water before, to get them on the water," said Rowse, who taught the participants how to build their boats and told them about Boston's maritime history in the process.

Rowse dashed up and down the dock to assist with the launchings and explain to the participants how to climb into their boats without capsizing them.

"The way to get in is not to stand up and shake the boat!" he said. He gave lessons on how to row and steer.

The marina echoed with children's laughter as the boats sliced gingerly through the water.

The boat building teams included families and youth groups. Each team spent between \$50 and \$500, depending on their ability to pay, for a four-day workshop in which they built the traditional skiffs from scratch, using cedar boards, screws, and cotton to seal the seams. The nonprofit group Save the Harbor/Save the Bay helped with the expenses, donating \$5,000.

"It's four days. And you get to go home with a boat," Rowse said.

The construction took place at different locations along the waterfront, including areas next to the John Joseph Moakley United States Courthouse and the Boston Children's Museum.

"If you were here in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18th centuries you couldn't go without hearing 'boom, boom,' people beating the cotton into all those schooners," Rowse said. He will direct the final construction of the season on Sept. 27-30, inside the lobby of the World Trade Center Boston on Seaport Boulevard.

"Just the physical and even mental aspects of creating something with your kids was something we hadn't done before," said Pamela Lomax, an administrator at Harvard who built her skiff with her daughter, Zakya, 6, and son, Yeshaya, 11. Lomax, who lives in Hyde Park, is planning to take her family on trips in their new boat in Boston Harbor and on the Charles and Neponset rivers.

"I was like, oh, my goodness. It was a piece of plywood and now it's a boat!" exclaimed Tamika Davis of Mattapan, whose son, Shyhein, 13, built one of the skiffs with his friends from Massachusetts Youth Committed to Winning, a sports program for children.

Davis watched from the dock as Shyhein, his friend, Anthony West, 14, and their basketball coach, Brandon Watson, rowed across the water, narrowly escaping a collision with another team of rookie boat builders, three girls from the Vine Street Community Center. One of the girls, K'dasia Bonds-Nixon, covered her head in an expression of mock horror and laughed.

"This rowing is something to get used to," Watson called across the water.