

Riverdale Goes Outside

LEARN ABOUT THE EXCITING WAYS OUR COMMUNITY OF ALUMNI, STUDENTS, AND FACULTY ENGAGE WITH THE WORLD OFF CAMPUS

Photos top to bottom: photo courtesy of Rocking the Boat; River Campus student gardening; Student resting on a rock face during a climbing expedition. Opposite page, top to bottom: Tess Rosenthal '16 rock climbing during a trip to the "Gunks"; Will VanDyke '20 in Alaska; Amanda Chiles '17 enjoying a fall hike.





Adam Green '91

by Maxwell Steinberg '24

Adam Green started the volunteer project that would become *Rocking the Boat* in 1995 during a semester off from Vassar College. Influenced by his experience teaching kids about the Hudson River aboard the Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, he developed a program that used the process of building and using wooden boats as a way to educate and empower young people from underserved communities. He has received numerous awards and accolades for *Rocking the Boat*, including an Echoing Green Fellowship, a Union Square Award for grassroots organizing, a Manhattan Institute Social Entrepreneurship Award, and in 2014 was named one of 25 international CNN Heroes.

A Manhattan native, Adam Green '91 jokes, "Sometimes I say I grew up on a small island on the eastern seaboard of the United States." Adam's wit reflects his ability to put things in perspective, a quality he developed from a young age. As a kid, Adam got involved with his family in an organization called Hudson River Sloop Clearwater that operates a 106-foot wooden sailboat and works on education and advocacy initiatives related to the Hudson River. He explains, "Every year or so, we [would] go for a sail

in New York Harbor, which created a very different perspective on my home beyond all of the city's skyscrapers."

An affinity to nature became part of Adam's identity: Once he became a high school student at Riverdale, he spent much of his time away from school outdoors, on camping and backpacking trips. Indeed, he remembers, "The summer after my junior year, one of my close friends and I hiked a couple of hundred miles on the Appalachian Trail through the Shenandoah Mountains in Virginia."

Adam's passion for the environment did not stop with these adventures. "Coming from a family involved in social and environmental activism," Adam had "this crazy idea during [his] junior year that we shouldn't be throwing away our plastic and metal bottles and cans." Inspired, he found an organization in Inwood that accepted bottles and cans and turned the deposits into contributions to the homeless.

After graduation, Adam left the "gorgeous oasis" of the Hill Campus's nature-filled campus for Vassar College. After spending a few years trying to make his way and determine his next steps, Adam took a semester off during his junior year, volunteering on the *Clearwater*, the same boat he spent time on during his childhood. Educating young people about the Hudson River during these months away from school motivated Adam's "excitement about experiential education and teaching, especially through things that impact us." He reflects, "Working on the *Clearwater* gave my learning a purpose."

In 1998, influenced by his love of nature and hands-on learning, Adam founded *Rocking the Boat*, a non-profit in the South Bronx that, in Adam's words, "offers young people the opportunity to discover new possibilities both within their community and themselves. Kids at *Rocking the Boat* build traditional wooden boats from scratch, use them to research and restore the Bronx River, and learn to sail in a community that has



Top left: Adam Green '91. Additional program photos courtesy of Rocking the Boat.

never before been connected to nature.” However, it’s about far more than just boats and nature, as Adam emphasizes: “Really what we’re doing is supporting young people in growing into successful adults and then offering them the tangible and intangible resources to succeed.”

Adam discusses the challenge inherent in being an entrepreneur in “actually making something happen successfully and filling in the gap between inspiration and execution” in the context of his own experience. For example, Adam

describes that when he founded Rocking the Boat 25 years ago, “I was naïve and thinking that kids are going to build this boat and have this amazing transformative experience despite all these other challenges in their lives and family situations, school situations, and economic situations.”

In hindsight, Adam describes this mindset as “more like giving you a nice-tasting lollipop and asking you to enjoy it, but when it’s gone, it’s gone.” So, as his organization developed, he recognized

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that “actually we need to add on all these extra layers of support and engagement and connection and advocacy,” meaning that “now [our students] have this whole big organization with social workers and multiple levels of program staff who help with college and post-secondary prep as well as supporting alumni with getting scholarships.”

Regardless of each individual’s unique field of interest, Adam considers his work an example for current Riverdale students: “Riverdale gives its students so much in the way of intellectual and social capital that with a lot of dedication, sweat, and patience, we have the resources and the power to realize even the most uncommon ideas.” Adam notes that this position is one of great privilege, sharing, “Like any powerful tool, this privilege should be treated with a great deal of reverence, respect, and humility so that you can use it to the greatest effect.”

Maxwell Steinberg '24 is a Riverdale junior and the co-editor of The Riverdale Review.