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Solar boat shines at the wharf

High School project sets the stage for sun-powered cruises in the harbor and bay

BY JULIE LANE | STAFF WRITER

Thanks to students from Riverhead, there's more green in Greenport now that the Glory has become the first U.S. Coast Guard-certified, solar-powered boat.

It all began two years ago as a class project for Riverhead High School science teacher Robert Jester to engage his students in a study of how alternative energy sources might be used on the East End. Mr. Jester, who lives in Greenport, never imagined that the classroom exercise would end up creating a permanent extension of Riverhead's school program.

The project came to fruition this month with the installation of solar panels on the roof of S.T. Preston and Son by Eastern Energy Systems, powering Glory, the all-electric boat that docks at the Main Street wharf. The boat runs four to five hour-and-a-half cruises a day, showing tourists the wonders of Greenport Harbor and Peconic Bay. The trips begin in June and run through Labor Day, continuing with some cruises through October.



RANDEE DADDONA PHOTO Glory, which Captain David Berson docks at S.T. Preston & Son in Greenport, has been converted into the first U.S. Coast Guard-certified solar-powered boat.

Not only has the Glory solidified its role as a nonpollutant of the waters of Peconic Bay, but students from Greenport, Oysterponds and Riverhead are benefitting from educational programs on the waterfront. Glory Capt. David Berson is cutting the cost of operating his 30-foot Elco Fantail launch and is redirecting his savings to a scholarship fund to benefit the students. And Riverhead has gained a campus extension where students can learn about solar energy.

The final pieces of the puzzle were put together by Josh Horton of East End Maritime Institute; benefactor Jim Moore of Riverhead, a former student of Mr. Jester's; and Jamie Minnick of E2 Systems. Originally told that the project would cost about \$10,000, students began raising funds by establishing a paper recycling operation at Riverhead High School. They also earned some money by winning a science-based competition. The dream became a reality only after Mr. Minnick agreed to contribute the man-hours of his crew to do the work for less than \$5,000, Mr. Moore's contributed funds and Mr. Horton structured the contribution through his tax-deductible EEMI program, Mr. Jester said.

The Rowsom family, owners of Preston's, will reap the benefits of power not used by the boat in the off-season and E2 Systems gains positive publicity for its contributions to making the solar-powered boat a reality.

"Everybody wins," Mr. Jester said.

"It's a conjunction of private and public sectors in a positive symbiosis," Capt. Berson said. "It's nice to be enthusiastic about something besides the breakfast special," he said.

Mr. Jester said he overheard one of his students say to another: "Isn't this the way you always dreamed school would be?"

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