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RUDDER



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THE ACBS RUDDER

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On the Cover: Joe Fleming with Lois Terrace, at this years ACBS Annual Meeting in Racine. We are happy to share a tribute to Joe Fleming, an ACBS founder, written by Neil Satterly starting on page 31.



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URBAN BOATBUILDERS: THE ART OF LAUNCHING BOATS AND YOUTH

BY MICHAEL WURTH, UBB DEVELOPMENT OFFICER/INSTRUCTOR AND JACQUELINE BILEK, UBB VOLUNTEER

ADDITIONAL WRITING BY ANTHONY WILLIAMS, TOR PETERSON, KTRU MOO, SHYANNA CARPENTER AND PATRICK FENNE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY: MARK HAWKINS

URBAN BOATBUILDERS

Sometimes the meeting of disparate neighbors within our community gives us pause to lift our hearts and believe in each other. Urban Boatbuilders (UBB), a Saint Paul, Minnesota, non-profit, works at just such a juncture.

Quoting a youth apprentice, on the one hand you have a “bunch of grey-haired boater dudes,” with a correction of “dudes and dames” and not all grey-haired, who are impassioned about youth empowerment, the outdoors, water, silent boats and woodworking. These are UBB’s experienced staff and extraordinary volunteers who help our apprentices facilitate wooden and skin-on-frame construction of canoes, kayaks, prams and paddle boards.

The other contingent, Urban Boatbuilders’ paid apprentices, are 16–19 year-olds, who are eligible for free or reduced price lunch or have a barrier to employment, including but not limited to students receiving special education services, limited English proficiency, juvenile offenders and youth in diversion programs, youth with chemical dependency issues, or youth who are parenting. Many of these young folks have not had the opportunity to try woodworking,

paddle a boat, be in the wilderness, swim in a lake or go camping. For the staff and volunteers, these events have shaped much of their lives. Questions about what experiences the wilderness holds or how to paddle a canoe bring excitement and

energy to the shop every day. So, the new apprentices join UBB with both curiosity and reservation.

What happens when you put the apprentices and volunteers together? Through time, acceptance, trust, a proven curriculum, sanding with the grain, steam bending wood and the shop mantra ... “there are no errors that can’t be fixed,” they form a new community. A safe, inclusive, predictable, encouraging foundation is formed that supports launching boats—and futures.

Before we introduce you to the specifics of the Urban Boatbuilders’ program, it’s our privilege to introduce you to a number of our apprentices who graciously agreed to write their stories themselves for the Rudder. The staff at Urban Boatbuilders is continually awed by their stories, insights, and journeys. Enjoy.



ANTHONY WILLIAMS



Hi, my name is Anthony, and I’ve been working at Urban Boatbuilders for over two years. I think being here has really saved my life. Before coming to UBB, I just sat at home eating a lot and just being lazy. That led to me weigh over 300 pounds and feeling awful.

So I started talking about jobs, just for something to do. My friend, Steven, worked at Urban Boatbuilders and said I should stop in. I was shy at first but it did look cool. I applied and a month later, I had the job. It felt good to tell my mom that I had gotten a job by myself, especially after struggling so much in school.

Going to school after I got the job was fun. I was so excited to go to work, I used to dance on the corner in front of all the school

buses while waiting for the city bus. I got to make people laugh and smile. Being happy helped me lose weight.

I’m glad I’ve been at UBB so long; it’s exposed me to new opportunities and careers. I’ve built an amazing row boat called a Nordic Pram. Then I learned how to row one. I’ve been on TV multiple times spreading the word about the work we do, and showcasing my skills in such things as steam bending, lashing, and tool use. I also want to thank the organization for getting me out of my comfort zone, and teaching me life skills like public speaking, that will help me in future careers. Now, I’ve also been able to perform comedy stuff at school, for families, and some stand up.

I’ve also been able to go camping in the Boundary Waters for a week. We tested the boats we built and developed outdoor skills. I really like the freedom you have steering the canoe where you want it to go. You just use your muscles and mind to get there.

I want to be a comedian and a professional cyclist. I love making people laugh and smile. And, I love riding bikes long distance. After



I left Urban Boatbuilders I got a job in a bike shop to advance my bike skills. I have gone from biking twenty miles a week to biking over a 100 miles per week. I'm also planning on taking classes at the Carpenter's Union or North House Folk School in Grand Marais, Minnesota, to learn how to make other types of boats. I want the people of the "Land of Ten Thousand Lakes" to be happy with my work.

Authors note: Anthony shared that he hardly looked at trees before. Now he is knowledgeable about different types of wood, their appropriate use and is amazed by all the products and benefits they provide.

TOR PETERSON



No place has ever engaged the passions of my past, present, and future like Urban Boatbuilders.

I grew up in the small coastal village of Brooklin, Maine, known to many as the "Wooden Boat Building Capital of the World," home to Wooden Boat School and *WoodenBoat* magazine. In eighth grade, our

class went to Wooden Boat School every Friday and built a skin-on-frame canoe and Greenland kayak. I was bullied a lot throughout elementary and middle school, and the boat-building was the only consistently positive experience I remember having with my class.

I never anticipated that something from my Maine upbringing, boatbuilding, would come back into my life in such a big way after moving to a new hometown in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Paired with my move came my passion for social justice, especially the issues of gender and sexuality. Urban Boatbuilders is primarily a youth-empowerment organization, committed to helping youths with barriers to employment find jobs and with job skill training.

My main barrier to employment? I'm transgender. While my birth certificate is marked with an "F", that's not who I am at all. I identify as male, and have changed my name, appearance, and a whole stock of other things, to reflect this. This is also known as social gender transition.

Why is this a barrier to employment? During the job application process, you always have to come out as transgender. It's not optional; it's essential. My name and gender marker (M/F) are still not legally changed. There's a lot of transphobic people out there, including employers. Despite Equal Opportunity Acts, many employers see "trans" employees as a hassle or are simply not willing to respect our humanity. This makes getting a job as a transgender person very difficult. Just as I had felt rejected in an educational environment as an openly queer kid, I felt rejected by the vocational world as a transgender teen. Until I found Urban Boatbuilders.

I started at UBB during a week-long apprenticeship over Spring Break, called B.O.A.T, or Building Our Alliances Together. It combined teaching boat building skills with daily workshops on social justice issues. On the day devoted to gender and sexuality, I was invited to lead the workshop. Since then, I've been very committed to advancing the LGBTQ+ initiatives at UBB, as part of their social justice mission. I worked hard to make sure these values were upheld daily, for instance in making sure that people were referred to by correct gender pronouns. I also wrote and received a grant to be able to put on workshops related to transgender issues at Urban Boatbuilders.

As a Youth Instructor at Urban Boatbuilders, I came to realize just how much education meant to me. Finding my career path has been difficult, and I'm not certain I'll ever be certain! However, working as a Youth Instructor helped me realize that I love to teach, no matter what I'm teaching or what setting. I love giving workshops and helping people learn new things. Teaching people is the only way that I can truly improve this world to love and accept transgender people, and I'm ready to set my life to that goal. But it's not just teaching about that. Working with Urban Boat has helped me to realize my role as an educator and a leader, and I'm forever grateful.

Authors note: This fall, Tor will be attending a private college in Minnesota with a focus on Education and Social Justice.



KTRU MOO



Working at Urban Boatbuilders has influenced me to work hard toward a better future. My name is Ktru, and I am the oldest of five siblings. I was born in Mae La, a refugee camp in Thailand. I was raised in the refugee camp for eight and a half years, until my family got a chance to move to the United States for better opportunities.

My grandparents from my mother's side came to the U.S. a year before us. We traveled to the U.S. and arrived in Fort Worth, Texas. My family then moved to Dumas, Texas, to live by my grandparents for another six years. Once we settled in the U.S., it was hard for me to learn English. I was held back twice in my Texas elementary school due to my English. In my teens, we moved again, this time to St. Paul, Minnesota, where there were more Thai-Karen people who could help my grandparents. I started school at Como Park Senior High School where friend from Mae La Camp also attended. We talked about having part-time jobs and asked our soccer coach for help. He told us about Urban Boatbuilders.

I was really nervous at my interview. The apprentice who helped interview me was one of the Como Park High School students that I had seen many times. This calmed me because I saw someone familiar.

The first day of training I was even more worried because I didn't know anyone. I am a shy and anxious person, with no confidence in my communications. All the tools on the shop wall had me worried that I might not understand how to use them. But as training continued, we'd reflect on the tools we used and learned their purpose. This discussion of the tools also helped me get to know more about the other apprentices. Everyone was friendly. Slowly, I began to communicate more.

I want to be a car mechanic so that would involve communications. My weakness was communications and UBB helped me improve and to think through what I'm saying. Urban Boatbuilders' apprenticeships are really amazing jobs for youth development. You get to learn more than just woodworking. You get to test the canoes on a lake or a river. The staff also takes you on field trips where you learn about many other jobs or future careers. I am glad that I work here.

My UBB apprenticeship taught me to use my time better and I started improving at school. My parents have had a big impact on me; they have done many difficult things to support my future. After high school, I will go back to Thailand and visit my grandparents from my dad's side. I also want to go to college for a degree in auto mechanics. It will be a useful skill to learn; I will be able to help my family and friends with their vehicles. I am the person I am today because of all the things that have impacted my life. I want to say "Thank You" to all the people who have supported me.

Authors note: In addition to actively helping his family, improving his grades, and being a UBB apprentice, Ktru is an active soccer player on a local Karen team and plays varsity soccer at Como Park High School. He practices over 20 hours weekly and hopes to play at higher levels of competition. He is also focused on studying business and finance with a dream to own his own service station.

SHYANNA CARPENTER



Hey, I'm Shyanna but everyone calls me Shy. I love to play volleyball, shop, go biking, cook (mostly baking), do crafts and hang out with friends like any other teenager. I also enjoyed doing things with my hands growing up. When I was in grade school I made a bird house out of wood, glass, a hammer, and nails.

In my middle school years I took a class called E2 (Environmental Inquiry Immersion). We did a lot of outdoor science and we would often visit Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center in northern Minnesota. Wolf Ridge is the first place where I learned how to paddle and do a T-rescue if a canoe tips. Ever since then I've really been interested in environmental science and nature. My Mom also encouraged me. She took me up to my reservation to an annual event called "Ojibwe Language Camp." We learned more about our culture, met new people, and Mom and I participated in a canoe race.

When I began high school I kind of lost all of this. I didn't go back to Wolf Ridge with the other kids from my class because I was more focused on sports. My grades were also slipping. I started getting into fights with my mom and I wasn't going to school every day.

I heard about Urban Boatbuilders through my social worker. I was curious about the program because of my previous experience with canoes. I'd never been in a woodworking shop before. I learned woodworking tasks quickly and began to really like it. Urban Boatbuilders helped me gain skills in leadership, communication, and teamwork. And my grades definitely went up since I started working here!

I think the best thing I learned here is that you can always fix your mistakes. I've worked on canoes, kayaks, and even a paddle. Our canoe building team also went to the Minnesota State Fair where we held all-day building demonstrations in front of thousands of fairgoers! We've gone on fun camping trips and gotten to know a lot of really cool people. It gets me away from all the negativity that's going on. I enjoy being in nature and the coolest thing is we get to paddle boats we made ourselves.

Authors note: Shy is working toward being a professional baker with her own company. She likened mixing the 2-part polyurethane waterproof coating to following a food recipe. We trust the poly mixing and the other transferable skills learned at UBB will support her business success. And, we await those promised cupcakes!



Since its inception in 1995, Urban Boatbuilders has stayed true to its mission to empower youth to succeed through woodworking and experiential learning.



PATRICK FENNE



Hello! I am Patrick. Before I talk about what Urban Boatbuilders means to me, I'd like to share some things about myself. I come from a family of six, of which I am the youngest. When I was very young I had severe autism. Thankfully my autism has died down significantly, although it still affects me. Every day my goals are honesty and friendliness.

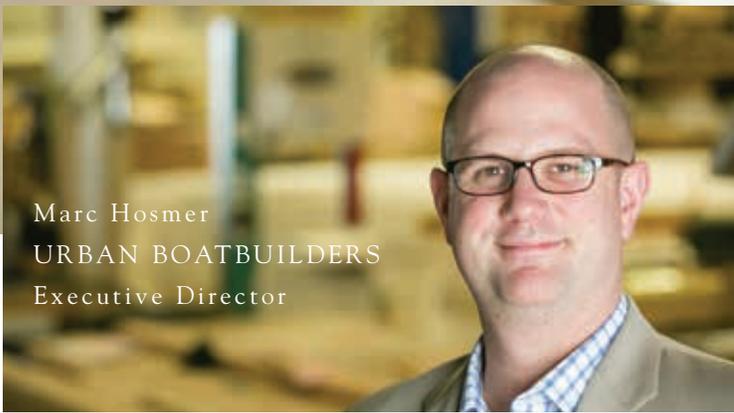
I am currently 18 years old and have been accepted to a local college for a degree in either public policy or public affairs. Eventually I want to have a career in the political world. Currently, the issues that are most important to me are health care, climate change, and the wealth gap.

I first heard about Urban Boatbuilders from my case manager. After being accepted as an apprentice, I struggled with my first project, making a tool box. I was the last of the new apprentices in my crew to finish the project.

My boat building skills slowly improved. I became a Senior Apprentice and then, a Youth Instructor. Some of my favorite things to do in the boat building process are using band saws and steam bending. My biggest challenge, even now, is lashing the pieces of the canoes together with artificial sinew. Working at Urban Boatbuilders has been a great place for me. UBB has made me confident as an individual. Being a Youth Instructor has given me leadership experience and money management skills, like creating and sticking to a budget, which I feel will help me when I get into my career. The activities and the nature of the work we do has made me feel more comfortable speaking up. Within the crews there is very little tension and the people I work with have been great.

In addition, I was never much of an outdoor type. That changed when I went on the first camping and canoeing trip with UBB. The trip took place on the St. Croix River about an hour northeast of Minneapolis. I loved going back to the basics of human life for a little bit and canoeing the river was absolutely gorgeous. I now look for more opportunities to go camping.





Marc Hosmer
URBAN BOATBUILDERS
Executive Director



Michael Wurth
URBAN BOATBUILDERS
Development Officer
and Instructor

ABOUT URBAN BOATBUILDERS

Since its inception in 1995, Urban Boatbuilders has stayed true to its mission to empower youth to succeed through woodworking and experiential learning. The organization uses boatbuilding to allow youth to thrive through creative, hands-on development, and because woodworking allows instructors to weave in important skill practice such as problem solving, collaboration, and verbal communication. The framework for these 21st-century skills was developed with input from education experts and business leaders to define and illustrate the skills and knowledge students need to succeed. For twenty years, Urban Boatbuilders has used the foundations of hands-on learning and 21st-century skills to build strong programs.

The Apprenticeship Program is a paid employment training program, through which underserved youth are able to build the 21st-century skills that research shows are critical to achieving future academic, vocational, and life success. Youth work together in a cohort of peers to build boats, gaining workplace readiness skills along the way. They attend weekly workshops on a range of topics from workplace etiquette, to financial literacy, to resume-building and mock interviews—and in the warmer months, they test out their watercrafts on local lakes and in the Boundary Waters. The program provides unique challenges for youth, creates a sense of accomplishment and pride, and fosters the ability to work as part of a team and develop positive relationships. Through this, youth gain perseverance, problem-solving and craftsmanship skills. Youth who complete the program will have the skills, knowledge, and support to pursue their goals, and to obtain and maintain stable employment.

The Partnership Program serves 1000+ students each year at middle schools, high schools, and community organizations across the Twin Cities. The Partnership Program provides experiential learning opportunities to students who thrive through hands-on, creative alternatives to standardized education, promoting understanding of academic content at higher levels by weaving 21st-century interdisciplinary themes and applied learning into curriculum. Whether applying techniques of angle and length measurements or understanding the chemical properties that make a boat waterproof and durable, students have the chance to learn and develop a variety of skills firsthand. Through these hands-on learning opportunities, students gain technical proficiency, the latest skills, and apply academic concepts to real-world projects. In addition, the students get to launch their finished boats on a local lake or river, connecting them to the inner city nature available in their own backyards.

You can support Urban Boatbuilders by making a tax-deductible donation either by mail or online at urbanboatbuilders.org/donations. Additionally, all the proceeds from boat and paddle sales help support youth programming. Please consider making a gift to positively impact a young person's life. 

To learn more about our program contact us at urbanboatbuilders.org or at (651) 644-9225. Our address is 2288 University Avenue West, Saint Paul, MN 55114. You can make donations at urbanboatbuilders.org/donations

