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## ***Atlantic Challenge's Stockinger: returning to basics***

By Shlomit Auciello



**ROCKLAND** — While he still has workshop space in the three-story building that houses the Apprenticeshop in Rockland, Eric Stockinger said he isn't spending much time building boats these days.

"My hand tools are now my cell phone and the computer," the new executive director of Atlantic Challenge said.

Eric Stockinger is the new executive director of Atlantic Challenge.

*(Photo by: Shlomit Auciello)*

The nonprofit, which offers sailing programs and operates the Apprenticeshop, has been through a number of changes in recent months. Last December, Executive Director Warren Kaericher left the position he'd held since 2003, to be replaced by Rick Palm in an interim role.

Five months ago, Atlantic Challenge hired Jeffrey C. Lewis to take the helm of the organization that teaches traditional wooden boatbuilding skills and seamanship in its facility on the Rockland waterfront. Lewis left that position in August, and in September Stockinger became the fourth person to serve in the role of executive director in less than a year.

While this is a change for him, Stockinger is not new to Atlantic Challenge.

"I started as an apprentice in 2004," he said in an interview Nov. 11. Because of a year-long gap for a family emergency, his boatbuilding apprenticeship wasn't completed until 2007. At the end of that year, after six months assisting in the shop, Stockinger was hired as the shop director, where he continued until his recent change of position.

Prior to arriving in Maine, Stockinger worked in California, Texas and his native state of Michigan for REI, the nation's largest consumer cooperative, which sells outdoor equipment by catalog, through stores and online.

"I liked woodworking and cabinetry and had a real interest in boating," he said. He had done woodworking with his father, and together they built a wooden kayak in 1992.

"The first time I looked at the Apprenticeshop was when I was a freshman in college," he said. He finished college and began his career at REI. Later, when he found himself looking for a more hands-on experience, Stockinger turned to the Apprenticeshop at Atlantic Challenge.

"I know everything we do here," he said of his relationship to the mission of the organization he now heads. "I'm passionate about it."

"A lot of people drive by and don't know what we do," he said. "They know we do something with boats and with kids on the water. People from the local community are amazed that we have this 11,000-square-foot shop on three floors, the pier, docks and two-and-a-half acres of waterfront."

Stockinger said his goal is to introduce more people to the facility and its offerings.

"We've tried a lot of different things," he said. "We've had a lot of turnover over the past few years." Now he hopes to reemphasize the nonprofit's mission and build on its strengths.

"We'd like to expand our adult sailing program and bring back the summer workshops," he said. Those workshops, which were part of the Atlantic Challenge curriculum in 2005, include one and two week boatbuilding classes and a special week-long sailing program.

Stockinger said the organization is considering offering a 12-week internship, and hopes to partner with local colleges so that students can include work at Atlantic Challenge as part of their higher education.

"Our mission is inspiring personal growth through craftsmanship, community and the traditions of the sea," he said.

Like many nonprofit organizations, Atlantic Challenge has had a difficult year financially, Stockinger said. The organization is supported by apprentice tuition, donations and the sale of boats that are built in the Apprenticeshop, both preordered by commission and built in anticipation of future sale.

"If we were a straight boat shop, we would have laid off half of our apprentices this year," he said. As it is, the shop started nine boats during that period and only three remain to be sold. Fifteen apprentices are enrolled in the boatbuilding program. That's twice as many as during Stockinger's own apprenticeship.

Other changes at Atlantic Challenge include the hiring of George Sprague as part-time shop manager and the election of three new members to the 22-member board of directors.

First-year apprentice Justin McAnaney was elected by his peers to be their voice on the board. Like many apprentices, Stockinger said, McAnaney has a background as a professional and came to Atlantic Challenge to have a more hands-on experience than the one he was getting in his job as a lawyer.

Pat Lydon is semiretired and works as business manager at Kieve Wavus. In 2005, Lydon purchased a 24-foot lobsterboat from Atlantic Challenge that was the first boat built by Stockinger.

The other new board member is Fred Boursier, an experienced racing sailor.

"We want more people on our board who do what we do and are tied to our community," Stockinger said. "We would like to have a wooden boat builder on the board." He said all the board's members are sailors, do some level of woodworking and have a strong interest in experiential education.

Stockinger said the shop is likely to be quiet until January; however, work continues on four new boats and one restoration. He said the organization plans to re-institute a winter lecture series and will begin its monthly talks in January.



"We're looking forward to next summer," he said. In the meantime, he added, "We're just steaming ahead."

For more information about Atlantic Challenge and the Apprenticeshop, visit [atlanticchallenge.com](http://atlanticchallenge.com) or call 594-1800.