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CITY WEEKLY / CHARLESTOWN; IN NAVY YARD SWITCH, TEENS GETTING THE GATE

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In the Charlestown Navy Yard, on the pier next to the 200-year-old USS Constitution, Ed McCabe and Lory Newmyer employ 16 youths no one wants to hire.

Most of the youngsters come with little education and no job experience. They're from rough areas, some with violent pasts, and they've all been in trouble with the law - some return to prison every night after work.

Despite this, The Gateway Project, a prevocational program run by McCabe and Newmyer, has been doing similar hires

every summer for nearly 20 years, teaching light carpentry and other job skills, providing at least a year of follow-up services, and giving paychecks to teenagers, many of whom have never earned a dime they weren't paid under the table.

Yet after nearly two decades of service and after surviving this year's funding cuts to Boston's summer job programs for youth, Gateway may lose its home in the Navy Yard.

"Last fall, [the National Park Service] told us they had other plans for the Yard and we'd have to leave," said McCabe, one of the founders of the 25-year-old Hull Lifesaving Museum and the director of its Maritime Program, which operates several projects, including Gateway.

"Over the past 18 years, the Park Service has been an incredible friend to the museum - they welcomed us into this park and have given us rent-free space on the pier and in the carriage house next to the commandant's house. We've been able to build and maintain our program [with outside funds] because of their generosity - but now, we're fighting for our lives."

The mission of the Lifesaving Museum combines historical preservation of the region's maritime culture with hands-on education and social service.

In addition to Gateway, other programs it runs on park grounds include a free seasonal rowing experience for younger Boston-area youths called "We're All in the Same Boat" that sends novice rowers out in the Museum's fleet along with professional staff members as well as helpers from the Gateway Project, and "Safe Waters," a year-round after-school program for youths ages 10 to 21 from disadvantaged metropolitan areas.

"Ed and Lory were really pioneers," said Sean Hennessey, public affairs officer for Boston National Historical Park. "They were visionaries who came here when park managers were looking to activate the area with activities that would add to [the Yard's] vitality. They helped bring the national parks to urban people not able to see places like Yosemite and other national treasures. But now that we've helped them start up, it's up to them to go off and start elsewhere. As much as we applaud what [the Hull Lifesaving Museum's] program does, we no longer have room for them here."

Over the past year and a half, the Boston National Historical Park has asked several of its longtime tenants to find new homes due to space limitations, including Opera Boston (formerly the Boston Academy of Music), the New England Museum Association, and the Wardroom Club, all of which occupied office space on park land in the Navy Yard.

"It was a very difficult decision for us, but we've just run out of room," said Hennessey, who lost his own sprawling office in the Navy Yard's grand Commandant's House as a result of the space crunch.

"There is a new push to address the maintenance backlog here in the park - to rehabilitate the structures we already have," said Hennessey, who now works out of a much smaller office in the Park's Marine Barracks. "Some of these structures haven't been touched in 100 years, and we've finally identified funds to do it."

In the coming few years, the national park plans to rehabilitate the Bunker Hill Monument and the USS Constitution.

According to the Park Service, the museum's programs occupy two areas that will be needed for the upcoming construction projects: the Commandant's Carriage House, which the museum has used as a classroom for some of its programs since 1997, and Pier 2 - next to the Constitution and a World War II destroyer, the USS Cassin Young - where the museum runs its job-training program and its free rowing programs for local youth. Both areas will be needed for "lay-down space" to store construction materials for the upcoming rehabilitation projects, according to Hennessey.

"Our primary mission is to provide a home for the USS Constitution, which is still an active duty naval ship," said Hennessey. "We have a legal agreement we have to honor with the US Navy, and obviously, that has to come first."

In comparison, the Park Service has a general agreement with the museum. "It's more like a gentlemen's agreement," said Hennessey. "It's a piece of paper with a renewable offer that states our arrangement. Because of our other needs and demands, the park management decided that they couldn't renew it this past spring."

Terry Savage, who has been the superintendent of the park since November of 2000, says he can understand his tenants' frustration at the situation and has offered to help them find new locales.

"It's been difficult," he said in a telephone interview.

"Everybody has been here for a long time, but they've all been very understanding.

"Lory and Ed have a wonderful mission, but it's not our mission, and we're in an incredible crunch now," Savage said. "We've taken a huge hit post-9/11 in terms of visitation. This park celebrates the Revolutionary War and the struggle to find freedom in America, and the Navy Yard is a continuation of that struggle. Our mission is to educate people and preserve that heritage.

"Ed and Lory's mission is helping those kids, which is a very important mission, but ours is to teach people about the importance of the Navy Yard. It's not the same as what they're doing here."

In addition, Savage points out that the Park Service offers several programs of their own catering to the urban youth population.

Bill Foley, the chief of interpretation and education for the Park Service, who has watched the museum's program mature over the last two decades, sees the Gateway Project as a unique program among its peers.

"There've been smatterings of programs like [the Hull Lifesaving Museum's] through the Park Service, but none have had the continuity or professional staffing that I've seen with McCabe and Newmyer's. Just the fact that they've survived all this time - nonprofits are always scrambling for resources - is a testament to their quality. They've just been a tremendous resource to us, bringing kids here who never would have had exposure to the urban national park right in front of them. There's no one else who comes close to that."

Though most of the other tenants who've been asked to move by the Park Service have already found new locations, the museum is still operating its programs this summer on park property, planning to stay in the Commandant's Carriage House at least until the September deadline given by the Park Service, and though it has begun to explore other options along the waterfront, McCabe and Newmyer hope to find a way to stay within the park's bounds.

"We've been here 18 years and this new administration has been here 18 months and they just haven't really gotten what we're doing here and why this place is so invaluable to us," McCabe said. "It's not just the free rent - we were

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prepared to find the funds if a new deal had been offered to us. The real beauty of this place is that we're able to take a group of kids who've systematically felt left out of the system and say to them, 'This is a public park. This place is yours, and you own it, you're allowed to come here, and you can get here by public transportation' - a huge advantage. 'This park is a right you have as a citizen.' And now, as a result of all that, there is a whole generation - people who might never have otherwise known this place existed - who now value this place, who can point to the USS Constitution and say, 'We rowed there. We worked there. It's ours.' "

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GRAPHIC: PHOTO, 1. Hull Lifesaving Museum staffer Beth Howard (left) and trainee Kerry Joseph (right) help carry a boat to the dock for maintenance and repairs. 2. Trainees John Herring (foreground) and Larmount Jones (rear left) repair a boat under the supervision of museum staffer Frank Townsend. 3. Museum staffer Emily Ennis (standing) guides a crew of job trainees and campers from a Massachusetts General Hospital program into the harbor. / GLOBE STAFF PHOTOS/TOM LANDERS

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