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## Children explore the Hudson's 'green oasis'

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Osjua A. Newton/The Riverdale Press

The Science Barge remains stationary while floating on the Yonkers side of the Hudson River. It is self-sustaining thanks to a series of windmills and solar panels.

Eight elementary-school-age children bent over trays of basil for a workshop on growing plants in water while cargo ships, tankers and private boats intermittently cruised along the Yonkers stretch of the Hudson River.

The children, who did not know each other prior to the session, were mostly quiet as a volunteer explained how to install small pots of basil above plastic containers with water at the bottom — hydroponics 101. But the participants' parents raved about the lesson.

"There's more to education than just books," said Renee Sprott, who brought her two sons to the barge from the South Bronx. "As long as they love it and they can learn from it, I'm for it."

The participants were among groups of children and parents from throughout the region who spent Sunday afternoon learning about urban farming aboard a refitted vessel known as the Science Barge.

The facility, run by the environmental non-profit group Groundwork Hudson Valley, features a greenhouse and stations aimed at teaching students the basics of hydroponics and renewable energy.

Along with attending the workshop, the children explored the barge's greenhouse full of vegetables including lettuce, kale, cucumbers, green beans and tomatoes. Robert Walters, director of the barge, said the ship's hydroponic techniques use one quarter of the water that typically goes into soil-based farming — one of the main ideas the barge's staff tries to impart to visitors.

“It's the most amazing place on the Hudson River,” Mr. Walters said of the ship. “I call it a green oasis because we're growing food using electricity that's totally off the grid.”

Mr. Walters, who introduces himself as captain of the currently docked barge, paced the deck with gusto as he met visitors and explained how the ship generates its energy. Two sets of solar panels provide 85 percent of the power, 15 percent comes from several small wind turbines and the rest from a biodiesel generator that uses a mixture of fuel and vegetable oil.