

Walls find it's easy going green

BY BILL EGBERT

YOU MAY have heard of green roofs, where rooftop plantings help lower energy costs. But how about green walls?

A group of Bronx high school students received professional certification last week after learning how to install so-called "living walls" at the Boston company that makes them.

"We had to learn how to mount the frames on the wall and install the planters, and then run the water lines through," said Stefan Barnes, 15, the youngest person ever to be certified in the technology.

"You have irrigation lines that water the plants automatically," explained Ivan Gonzalez. "It's interesting technology. When I heard about using them to grow edible plants like tomatoes, I thought that was really interesting."

Originally conceived as low-water "vertical farms" for ur-

ban agriculture, the green walls are also used for indoor and outdoor landscaping.

As part of their training at Green Living Technologies, the nine Bronx teens built a 64-square-foot wall of plants, arranged to depict the logo of City Scapes, a Boston company that co-sponsored their training.

"When they first started telling us about growing plants on the wall, it sounded really weird," said Linette Maria, 16. "I told my mom about it and she didn't think it was possible — so I want to make one for our house to show her."

The project took root after Stephen Ritz, a teacher at Discovery High School in Kingsbridge invited Green Living's CEO George Irwin to give a 40-minute presentation on the green wall concept to his class.

"That wasn't enough for these kids," said Irwin. "They were hungry for more — and I wanted to do more, too."

Irwin ended up bankrolling the kids' trip to Boston — including putting them up in a five-star hotel — and training them to build and install vertical gardens.

In addition to being impressed by the students' enthusiasm, Irwin said he wanted to train them because he sees the technology as a good match for the Bronx. He imagines vacant buildings being converted into large-scale urban farms that could provide jobs growing vegetables for the Hunts Point Terminal Produce Market.

While Irwin's vision might be a long way off, the students' training is already paying off. The kids all have summer jobs lined up, working for Greenleaf Gardens in Scarsdale, in a program teaching elementary school students about green walls and organic gardening.

Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr. presented the students with their certifications at Borough Hall last Tuesday before taking the borough's newest green-collar workers upstairs to tour the building's own green roof.

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GOT THE BALL ROLLING



Two men get in a little soccer skirmish at Bronx Park East near Allerton Ave. during last week's unseasonable chill. Photo by Victor Chu

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