

## RIDING TRUE

*A new public art installation makes a connection with kids on Vinalhaven.*

Let's face it: making a connection with young people isn't getting any easier, with instant messages, iPods, and Xboxes taking centerstage in most teenagers' lives these days. Which makes the success of an art project out on Vinalhaven even more remarkable. When the island's new K-12 school was built in 2003, state law mandated that it include fifty thousand dollars for public art projects. One of two art installations that beat out forty-eight other applicants was a fleet of model lobsterboats, with each vessel suspended from the ceiling in the school's entryway by a metal rod.

While such a creation is appropriate for the community that lands more lobsters than any other in Maine, it couldn't have captured the attention of island students if Diana Cherbuliez, the Vinalhaven artist behind the \$33,000 project, hadn't included one innovative detail. Each lobsterboat is wired to a wind indicator on the school's roof, and when the wind shifts, the boats pivot to point into the wind, just as they do in Carver's Harbor down the street.

"In a funny way the school is a scale version of the islands, and the lobsterboats are in a sense the harbor scaled down," explains Cherbuliez, who so insisted on accuracy that she hired boatbuilders to make fiberglass models of the actual working boats in the harbor, as well as marine painters to ensure each ship had the proper colors. "Now the kids say 'hey, that's my dad's color, that's the shape of my dad's hull.' And the boats don't turn in perfect unison, because boats don't do that. I didn't want these to be toys."

Cherbuliez says the installation has been well-received by the students, many of whom already haul traps in the morning and after school, as well as their parents and neighbors. "Everyone liked it because it was for them, about them, and yet was not condescending," she says.

Paying attention in a classroom after a summer on the water can be difficult enough, but this type of artwork proves that there are still ways we can make a connection with the next generation of Maine kids.