



*WORKING on two upcoming Eastport Arts Center (EAC) events, the holiday market and Festival of Trees, is (left to right) Island Fellow Tarah Waters, executive director Chris Grannis and publicity and marketing manager Lauren Koss. Waters is working as an Island Fellow at the EAC for the next year. (Lora Whelan photo)*

## Island Fellow joins staff at arts center

by Lora Whelan

When Denver, Colo., native Tarah Waters was a nine-year-old, she visited her aunt and uncle in Hallowell — and she loved it so much that she announced she was going to live in Maine some day. It's been a few years since — with a college degree earned in Rhode Island at Salve Regina University and 27 months with the Peace Corps in Morocco — but Eastport is now her home.

Waters is an Island Institute Island Fellow working over a 12-month period with the Eastport Arts Center (EAC) on a number of projects, including the upcoming holiday market and Festival of Trees. However, her primary project is working on a Makers Place proposal in collaboration with the Tides Institute & Museum of Art and the Peavey Memorial Library. She explains that the culmination of the work — with an action plan in place at the end of November and significant progress made on implementation plans by January — should result in a space full of resources and “tools for communal use” that would allow for artistic expression by community members.

It's a little bit like what she's doing now in the Eastport school system working with third, fourth and fifth graders. “I love to work with Eastport kids. They're brave and courageous with their art,” she says. “They like to challenge each other with questions of all kinds. They're very bold with their art.”

The rapport Waters has with the schoolchildren will come in handy as she implements other arts center programs that she says will work to “integrate diversity into the community.” EAC Executive Director Chris Grannis adds, “Because she's so great with kids, we're really using that to all our programs' advantages.”

Lectures and simultaneous workshops and classes in the school are in the works, with the timeline shooting for March 2016 at the earliest. One such class might have students creating self-portraits with a focus on an individual's unique characteristics and “celebrating what's different about self,” Waters elaborates. Simultaneously, the community would participate through a photographic tour of the island city where each person who participates would be asked the same three questions and have a portrait photo taken. The end results would be shown in a gallery show at the arts center. Waters brought her interest in the nature of diversity and the celebration of differences from her work in Morocco. It was too important to her to leave behind, she notes.

Her time in Eastport started with a bang when she arrived just in time for the Pirate Festival. Serendipitously, a college friend from Kennebunk had been thrilled by a previous year's Lubec invasion and, when the news arrived that Waters would be in the island city in time for the Eastport side of the festival, roared into town for a visit. They got dressed up and stood on Water Street. The next thing they knew, “someone snagged us to be in the parade,” handing over swags of beads and bags of candy to hand out. “We were a big hit,” Waters says with a laugh. Halloween was just as fun. “People are very creative with their costumes,” and not just the children, she adds.

And that creativity sums it up for her as one of the key elements to be found Downeast. “Outspoken and creative,” she says, is how she's finding Eastporters, with the island itself “absolutely beautiful.” It's unlike any other community she's been to in the U.S. The level of community pride is something that she says is “so rare to find these days.”