

# **2008 Barron Prize Winners and Honorees**

**E = Environmental Project**

## **WINNERS**

### **Michael (16), Massachusetts (E)**

Michael created Get the Lead Out of Fishing (<http://ReplaceLead.com>) to educate fishermen about the dangers that lead weights pose to wildlife, and to help them exchange their lead weights for safe alternatives. An avid angler, Michael had often wondered what happened to all the lead weights lost during fishing, and what effect they had on wildlife. While contemplating what to do for his Eagle Scout project, he decided to finally find out the answer to his question. What he discovered shocked him: up to 52% of loons, 25% of bald eagles, and 32% of trumpeter swans die each year from lead poisoning.

Working with scientists at the University of Massachusetts in Lowell and a veterinarian at Tufts University, Michael learned about non-lead alternatives, and soon got busy with his education and exchange program. He wrote grants and asked for contributions in order to make nearly 1,000 sample packages, which included non-lead weights and an informational card that he wrote. He asked for permission to participate in numerous fishing derbies, so that he could meet anglers and ask them to exchange their lead weights for his free package of safe alternatives. Over time, Michael distributed 700 sample packages, one fisherman at a time, and collected 63 pounds of lead – nearly 5,000 weights. He has spoken at the Massachusetts state legislature, and his research was used to help draft Senate Bill 466 to ban lead from fishing. “I’ve learned about the power of a good idea,” says Michael. “And I’ve learned that even small changes can save the lives of our endangered birds and wildlife.”

### **Additional Media Coverage**

Scholastic Science World – 3/16/2009

### **Phoebe (15), Wyoming**

Phoebe started the Magic Yeti Library in Nepal, first in a series of children’s libraries she has planned for the Himalayan region. Phoebe’s project grew out of her love for Nepal, where she spent three years of her childhood, and a realization two years ago that she was ready to give something back to the Nepalese people. She and a group of supporters, including the Alex Lowe Charitable Foundation, landed on the idea of building a children’s library, and chose as its location one of the schools established by Sir Edmund Hillary, near Mt. Everest.

Phoebe first helped establish a partnership with The Asia Foundation, which committed to shipping books to Nepal. She then set to work collecting and boxing a thousand pounds of children’s books, receiving donations from local schoolchildren as well as contacts across the U.S. Once the books had been shipped, she traveled to Nepal and arranged for Nepali language books to be added to the collection. Finally, she and a group of volunteers began a week of work on the actual library, painting walls and organizing books. The Magic Yeti Library opened in

### **Phoebe (15), Wyoming, continued**

April 2007 and now has a full-time librarian. Phoebe recently traveled to a completely different area of Nepal – the remote district of Mustang – to open her second library. “There’s a lot of work involved and also a lot of logistical challenges,” says Phoebe. “But when I’m reading aloud to a Nepalese child who has never seen a storybook before, I feel like I’m changing a life.”

#### **Additional Media Coverage**

JH News & Guide – 10/10/2008

### **Mollie (10), Virginia (E)**

Mollie created her own blog and letter-writing campaign as a way to help polar bears gain protection on the Endangered Species list. After reading at school about the plight of the polar bear, whose habitat is rapidly shrinking due to climate change, Mollie and some friends created “Save the bears!” posters and marched around the playground. Many of her peers taunted the girls, saying their march was accomplishing very little, and later that evening, Mollie realized they were right. She decided to take more concrete action and started a blog, where she posted statements such as “Polar bears like to swim, but they can’t swim forever!”, referring to the dire consequences of melting Arctic ice. She also asked people to write letters to the Fish and Wildlife Service supporting the polar bear’s inclusion on the Endangered Species list, and collected 171 letters.

When the Alaska Wilderness League learned of Mollie’s work, they asked her to speak at an Arctic rally on Capitol Hill, where she shared the stage with Senators John Kerry and Bernie Sanders – and stood on a box in order to reach the microphone. Mollie’s passionate blog has had far-reaching ripple effects, inspiring her own Girl Scout troop and many other children across the country to take action on climate change and environmental protection. “I’ve learned that I’m ready to help the world,” says Mollie. “Sometimes I am lost at what to do, but if we think positive, we can accomplish great things.”

#### **Additional Media Coverage**

Weekly Reader News – 1/23/2009

### **Paul (15), California**

Paul founded BUDDY, a peer tutoring and mentorship program that has helped more than 5,000 low-income students struggling in math and science. BUDDY (Building Understanding and Determination in Developing Youth) trains student volunteers to tutor children after school and on weekends, and to teach computer literacy at Boys and Girls Clubs. BUDDY has also partnered with the local school district and public libraries to conduct LEGO robotics workshops. A first-generation American from a low-income family, Paul started the program three years ago as a way to help students like himself.

### **Paul (15), California, continued**

Since then, his group has grown to involve over 120 student tutors and thousands of tutorees. Paul has partnered with high tech companies, foundations, and colleges to raise \$19,000 in funding for his program, and has received accolades from Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. He has also spoken on Capitol Hill in support of a Congressional bill that mandates Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math programs in every public high school. Still, Paul is most proud of the fact that 100% of BUDDY's volunteer tutors have gone on to four-year colleges or universities, and have garnered over \$133,000 in scholarships. "I've learned I have the tenacity and courage to create change in my community," says Paul.

### **William (17), Pennsylvania (E)**

William organized the community clean-up of a large-scale illegal dumping site and transformed it into an informative nature trail. He knew the site well, having played in its woods and creeks as a child, and for his Eagle Scout project, decided to finally remove the tires, appliances, and trash from a five-acre area. William set about obtaining the necessary permits from groups including the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection and his town's planning commission, and simply ignored all the naysayers who called his project too daunting. He worked tirelessly for nearly three years to secure donations of heavy equipment, services, expertise, and design plans, and organized volunteer crews to tackle the steep and secluded area. He and his crews removed 500 tires, 60 dump truckloads of debris, and salvaged ten tons of scrap metal, which they sold to help fund the project.

Having won the support of his early skeptics, William secured more donations in order to complete the signage, picnic areas, bird nesting boxes, and construction of bridges along a half-mile nature trail, which has received wildlife habitat certification through the National Wildlife Federation. To prevent future dumping at the site, William asked local law enforcement to increase its presence in the area, and is working with Pennsylvania Clean Ways to construct a barrier along the nearest roadway. "I've learned the meaning of tenacity," says William. "If you are passionate enough about your objective, you can inspire others."

### **Zoe (16), Vermont**

Zoe's project, Teens Connecting Continents, has raised over \$15,000 to support education and recreation for more than 2,500 children in Rwanda. Her program is run entirely by teens, as part of Change the World Kids, a non-profit community service group based in Woodstock, Vermont, of which Zoe is president. In April 2007, Zoe visited Rwanda and met with hundreds of youth there to determine how they and her teen group back home could best partner. The Rwandan teens identified education, medical care, and recreation – soccer, in particular – as their greatest needs. After talking for hours with the teens, Zoe, an avid soccer player, marveled when hundreds more showed up and an enormous soccer game ensued. She returned home impassioned to help, and shared her desire with Change the World Kids. The group got busy fundraising, selling baskets and art made by a Rwandan women's cooperative.

### **Zoe (16), Vermont, continued**

Zoe also established an extensive association with Partners in Health, which directs the group's Rwandan activities.

Teens Connecting Continents now provides a recreational soccer program for 2,700 Rwandan children. The group has purchased uniforms and equipment, hired a local director, and raised over 50% of the funding needed to rebuild the war-damaged soccer stadium. Zoe's group also provides funding for Rwandan children to attend school for the first time, and is working to offer medical care. "I've gained a new kind of patience and perspective that has allowed me to appreciate a bigger picture," says Zoe. "And I've learned that I can make a difference for kids on both sides of the world."

### **Colin (11), Connecticut (E)**

Colin founded the Cool Coventry Club as a way to increase awareness of global warming in his small rural town. For the past two years, he has educated residents, businesses, and governmental agencies about the causes of global warming, and the steps they can take to reduce their carbon footprint. Inspired by a trip to the Galapagos Islands, where he saw firsthand the effects of global warming on biodiversity, Colin returned home determined to do his part.

He has conducted over forty educational events across Connecticut, and has distributed hundreds of his informational brochures, canvas bags, and bumper stickers. He has convinced the local grocer to sell compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs) and to post an informational card he wrote about them, and has urged the library to upgrade to the energy-efficient bulbs. Through petition campaigns, Colin has convinced the town to commit to purchasing 20% of its energy from clean sources by 2010. He has helped eleven local businesses create action plans to reduce energy use, has spoken at the state legislature, and is working to get recycling bins placed in the town park. He has also written educational materials for elementary children, and speaks often to student groups about forming their own climate campaigns. "Changing behavior is a slow process," notes Colin. "But moving mountains begins with picking up one stone."

### **Additional Media Coverage**

Weekly Reader News – 10/28/2008

### **Forrest (16), Washington (E)**

Forrest organized the Pumpkin Project, a gardening initiative in which young students planted, harvested, and then sold pumpkins, raising \$2,500 for the local food bank. Forrest's project began with a demonstration garden at his school, which he created as a way to teach younger students about organic gardening. An avid 4-H member, he invited students to visit the garden to learn about beneficial insects, composting, and companion planting. While teaching kindergarten and first-grade students about planting seeds, Forrest realized he could expand the lesson on many levels, and his "Giving through Growing" program was born. Forrest transferred the kids'

### **Forrest (16), Washington (E), continued**

pumpkin starts into a local field (donated by farmers for a few months), and tended the pumpkins throughout the summer.

Come October, he asked the kindergarten and first-grade students to help with the harvest, and showed them how to sell their pumpkins at the local farmer's market. With sales of \$2,500, Forrest and the young students purchased over 80 cases of non-perishable food, which they delivered to the local food bank, along with a \$500 check. Forrest is excited to expand his project, and has been offered two additional fields for the coming season. "Take yourself and the world around you seriously," Forrest advises. "Each of us can make a difference."

### **Suzie (14), North Carolina**

Suzie created Suzie's Closet as a way to loan medical equipment to families whose children have special needs. Suzie was born with cerebral palsy, given poor odds at birth, and has endured countless surgeries. She uses a wheelchair and knows firsthand the challenge and expense families face in obtaining adaptive equipment. Four years ago, she decided to do something to ease this burden for others. She solicited new and used wheelchairs, walkers, and adaptive devices from hundreds of families willing to share what they no longer needed, and started spreading the word that she had equipment to loan. The loan closet quickly outgrew her family's basement, and is now housed in a 1,200 square foot warehouse, which Suzie purchased with her winnings from a Volvo for Life award.

Suzie's Closet has loaned medical equipment, free of charge, to nearly 1,000 families, and has built wheelchair ramps for four special needs clients. The organization also provides families with travel stipends for out-of-area medical expenses. "No matter what limitations you have, they don't have to hold you back," says Suzie. "It's just about looking beyond yourself and your own needs and struggles to those of other people around you."

### **Daniel (17), Minnesota**

Daniel founded First-VM, an organization that offers computer and technical support in exchange for donations – \$14,000 so far – toward relief for Lebanese refugees. Daniel, a first-generation American, was inspired to start his project six years ago after visiting Lebanon, his parents' homeland. While there, war broke out and he and his sister were evacuated by the U.S. Embassy; his father chose to stay behind to take care of relatives, and rejoined his family in Minnesota four months later. The experience forever changed Daniel, opening his eyes to the horrors of war and its refugees, and he knew he had to act.

A self-taught computer wiz who recently became qualified as a Mac Genius, Daniel realized he could use his passion for technology to help the Lebanese people. For the past three years, First-VM has recruited college students majoring in information technology to provide hardware and software installation services in the metro area where Daniel lives. In return, clients make

### **Daniel (17), Minnesota, continued**

voluntary donations, which are designated to Human Efforts in Aid of Lebanon (HEAL), a non-profit group that has helped 41,000 refugees from Lebanon, including Daniel's parents. "I've become more aware of the needs of refugees and of the importance of lightening their burdens," says Daniel.

### **Additional Media Coverage**

Star Tribune – 10/7/2008

## **HONOREES**

**Addie (14), Connecticut:** Addie introduced state legislation that would exonerate all those convicted of witchcraft in the Connecticut colonies, including her ninth generation removed great-grandmother, Mary Sanford. Addie is the first to attempt exoneration in Connecticut, which held the colonies' second-largest witch-hunt.

**Anne (17), Minnesota:** Anne created the non-profit "Dragonfly Project" as a way to help people who are grieving the loss of a loved one.

**Jessica (12), Washington:** Jessica created "Richard's Rwanda," a group that supports education for young girls in Rwanda who have been affected by the genocide there.

**Kelsie (13), Florida:** Kelsie rode her horse 150 miles across Mississippi as a way to raise \$100,000 in pledges and books to rebuild seven public libraries destroyed by Hurricane Katrina.

**Laura (17), Georgia:** Laura created Wild and Water, a program that provides free swimming and water safety lessons to low-income children.

**Margo (18), Florida:** Margo started The Gift of Food, a project that sells original holiday cards designed by local artists as a way to raise funds for her community's food bank. Has raised over \$150,000.

**Mischa (Posthumously), New Jersey:** Mischa founded Kids Helping Kids, a non-profit organization that raises money to help terminally ill children.

**Nicholas (15), North Carolina:** Nicholas founded the Nickelby Project, a non-profit organization which provides comfort items and gift bags to children facing extended hospital stays.

**Robin (18), Colorado:** Robin founded the Never Alone Foundation to support people diagnosed with inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). Her group offers emotional support, distributes educational brochures, and provides scholarships for children with IBD.

**Sarasi (18), Virginia:** Sarasi created the Keep Reading Foundation, which has collected and shipped over 10,000 children's books to tsunami-affected areas in Sri Lanka.