

2003 Barron Prize Winners

Anderson, age 16, Massachusetts

Anderson founded “Teens for Technology,” a teen-run organization that has donated fully-equipped computer labs to 25 schools across Jamaica. Anderson was inspired to start his project three years ago following a trip to Jamaica, where he learned that a typical school there of 850 students had only four computers. He considered sending the old computer in his basement to Jamaica, hoping to “make a little difference.” Instead, he founded “Teens for Technology.” “It just seemed like the right thing to do,” explains Anderson. “Too many people needed help and too many people were so willing to work to give that help. You just can’t turn away from that.” “Teens for Technology” has plans to equip 100 schools with 1,000 computers to serve 100,000 children, and Anderson has enlisted the support of Microsoft, Air Jamaica, and UPS to help with that effort. Word of “Teens for Technology” has spread worldwide and Anderson is now working to expand his program to other countries such as Rwanda and Trinidad.

Stefanie, age 18, Texas

Stefanie has created the first successful paper recycling program in her small Texas town. Upset at the amount of paper she saw her school and community throwing away, Stefanie presented a paper recycling proposal to City Council and received resounding support. She then contacted the nearest recycling company (70 miles away) but was told again and again that it wasn’t cost effective to place a bin in her town of 900 residents. Undaunted, Stefanie went door-to-door, gathering so much data in support of her idea that the recycling company finally agreed to place a paper bin in her community on a trial basis. That was nearly three years ago. Since then, her community has recycled 459 tons of paper and has saved over \$22,000 in disposal expenses. Stefanie donates all monies from the sale of the paper (nearly \$10,000 to date) to her local library and the Animal Welfare Society of Bandera County. “This experience has taught me to follow through on what I believe is right,” says Stefanie. “One person *can* make a difference.”

Reonda, age 17, North Carolina

Reonda led her Girl Scout troop and community in building the Girl Scout Gold House, a Habitat for Humanity home built completely by women. Reonda landed on the idea when considering community service projects she might tackle in order to receive her Girl Scout Gold Award, the highest award in Girl Scouts. “I looked around my community and saw there were many problems, especially with affordable housing,” says Reonda. “I was inspired to build a Habitat for Humanity home for a single mom with children.” Reonda took charge of each step needed to make her idea a reality. She spearheaded the fundraising campaign that successfully raised \$44,000 for the house. She wrote newspaper articles and countless letters, appealed to over 25 community groups for support, and recruited local girls and women to work on the house. She volunteered on other Habitat houses, learning how to hang trusses and siding. After a year of hard work and through the help of 115 other girls and women, Reonda and her Girl Scout troop

dedicated the Gold House on Mother's Day, 2003. Reonda is already planning Gold House II, another women-built house.

Amir, age 18, Minnesota

Amir led an air quality campaign that has resulted in a new Minnesota state law that greatly reduces children's exposure to diesel emissions. Amir first became interested in the issue at a Sierra Club meeting in December 2001. He immediately drafted a petition and gathered 1,500 student signatures in support of new state legislation to reduce children's exposure to diesel emissions. Amir then organized a rally of 150 students on the steps of the Minnesota state capitol where he presented his petition to the Senate Majority Leader. He also testified in front of the state Senate, wrote newspaper editorials, and did numerous television and radio interviews. Thanks to Amir's work, in May 2002 the state of Minnesota passed a law that requires schools to adopt no bus-idling practices and redesign air-intake vents and/or bus parking zones. Since then, Amir and the student group of the North Star Sierra Club have partnered with the Minnesota Office of Environmental Assistance on a statewide educational outreach campaign to help schools better understand the new policies. Amir and his Sierra Club peers have also developed an air quality curriculum for elementary school students that they present across metro Minneapolis. Based on Amir's model, the Sierra Club has begun a national campaign to get similar legislation passed in other states. "I have learned that making a difference is often a long and arduous path full of obstacles, setbacks, and tough decisions," admits Amir. "Nevertheless, the achievements and sense of fulfillment make it worth every bit of effort."

Shifra, age 16, New York

Shifra is known as the Sewing Lady at a New York City soup kitchen, where for six years she has spent several hours each Monday night mending clothes for people who eat there. As a fifth-grader volunteering at the soup kitchen, Shifra realized she could use her sewing talent and passion to patch coats, repair tote bags, and sew on buttons for people who had no one else to help them with these tasks. Soup kitchen clients quickly came to know and love Shifra not just for her sewing but for her conversation, her humor, and her interest in their lives. "I became addicted to helping people," explains Shifra, and so she recently expanded her efforts to create a co-ed sewing club at her school. The club meets weekly to learn to sew and to work on projects (such as small heart-shaped pillows) for children and the elderly in New York City's shelters. "I will never be able to sew every homeless person's coat or mittens," says Shifra, "But the little part I do makes all the difference to that one person."

Anthony, age 12, Wisconsin

Anthony created "Heavenly Hats" which has provided over 10,000 new hats to people who have lost their hair due to chemotherapy and other medical treatments. Anthony was inspired to start his program two years ago when his grandmother was diagnosed with cancer and lost her hair during chemotherapy. He decided a new hat might lift her spirits

and “Heavenly Hats” was born. Anthony first asked local businesses to donate hats, hoping he might collect enough to help several hundred people in the Green Bay community. Hats began trickling in. Then Anthony realized he could contact hat and embroidery companies worldwide via email. The hats came pouring in -- by the thousands -- and from such faraway places as Australia. Anthony sorts the hats and ships them (with money earned from doing chores) to more than 70 hospitals and clinics across the country. He also spends time speaking with other kids in his community about the importance of making a difference. “I started this project to put a smile on the faces of people going through a tough time,” he tells them. “But I think I have put an even bigger smile on *my* face by helping.”

Tanielle, age 17, Alaska

Tanielle serves as chairperson for the Anchorage Chapter of Alaska Youth for Environmental Action (AYEA), a program of the National Wildlife Federation, and has logged over 500 hours of volunteer service for the organization. She has lobbied legislators about protecting the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge from oil drilling, and coordinated a statewide letter-writing campaign on the Arctic Refuge directed at U.S. Congress members and newspapers. She has also greatly increased public awareness about her particular passion, protecting the Tongass National Forest. After having helped implement a recycling program at her school of 2,500 students, Tanielle is leading the effort to get similar recycling programs into all of Anchorage’s high schools. “Even the smallest thing one does to protect the environment really does help,” says Tanielle. “Achieving a sustainable environment is up to those who care about the earth. That means me.”

Kristen, age 17, Ohio

Kristen has organized numerous “Plant a Row for the Hungry” projects in which over 200 people have learned to garden and have donated 1,300 pounds of produce to area food banks. Kristen first began her work with the program in 1999, when each week she donated produce from her own garden to the Allegheny Indian Center -- a whopping 300 pounds of produce by the end of the summer! Since then, she has organized gardens at a homeless shelter in Akron, Ohio, and has worked with five 4H clubs to set up their own “Plant a Row for the Hungry” gardens. Most notably, she has organized a garden at a nearby juvenile detention center, an effort inspired by her own brother’s time at youth correctional facilities. At first hesitant to participate, the boys gradually came to take pride in their garden and there is now a waiting list for gardeners at the center. Based on this success, Kristen’s gardening program has been adopted by the Ohio Department of Youth Services and instituted in all twelve youth correctional facilities across the state. “I have learned that kindness is like a seed,” explains Kristen. “It doesn’t have to be very big, but just like a watermelon seed becomes a plant that takes over the garden, kindness will grow and flourish.”

Matthew, age 14, Connecticut

Matthew led a community-wide effort to construct an accessible playground in his hometown. Matthew has used a wheelchair all of his life and was unable to enjoy playgrounds until age six, when an accessible one was built in a nearby town. The playground became an important part of his life and in fifth-grade, he asked his class to help him make a “small donation” to Boundless Playgrounds, a national non-profit group that builds accessible playgrounds. When the fifth-graders’ fundraising efforts yielded \$10,000, Matthew decided to think big. He set a goal of raising the \$350,000 needed to build a Boundless Playground in his hometown. Matthew gave numerous speeches to community groups and convinced them to make donations. Two and a half years later, in the Spring of 2002, the playground opened with the name Friendship Place. Matthew’s efforts yielded more than the playground itself. “Friendship Place brought a new sense of unity to our town,” he says. “It also made people realize how important accessibility is.” On a personal note, Matthew adds, “I realized that nothing is impossible -- even raising \$350,000 -- if you try hard enough.”

Whitney, age 18, New York

Whitney has organized the “Stream Team” in her seaside community, leading over 50 student volunteers in cleaning up a local freshwater stream. Whitney began her program after learning from her father how once beautiful and free-flowing streams that fed into Long Island Sound had become stagnant and lifeless. Disgusted after a visit to the clogged streams, Whitney decided to rally her friends to clean them up. She first contacted the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation to ask permission and then got busy ordering waders, gloves, and trash bags needed to do the job. She had a 20-yard construction dumpster delivered to the site and sent out organizational flyers to friends and community members. On a rainy spring day in 2002, Whitney and over 50 volunteers removed 30 tires, 19 shopping carts, car parts, and refrigerators along three miles of the Brook Avenue stream. Building on this success, Whitney tackled an even larger and more challenging stretch of water in her second year, calling this project “Extreme Stream Team.” Again, she rallied dozens of volunteers and filled two dumpsters with debris from the stream. Whitney is making plans for the project to continue once she graduates from high school. “One lesson I learned from this project that I wish I could share with other students is that if you set out to complete something that has merit, you will be astonished by what you and your classmates can accomplish,” says Whitney. “It really is true that you can make a difference.”