

Nobleboro Youth Receives National Award

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by Samuel J. Baldwin
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Chloe Maxmin sits in the “writing cabin” on her family’s Nobleboro property, two days before she embarks on a three-month hike through South America. She radiates the intellectual optimism of a bright high school graduate poised to begin the rest of her life.

She looks forward to college as a haven of bookish philosophical questing, and a place where she will connect with others that share her energy and passion for activism.

“Having public transportation will be nice, too,” she said. In the fall of 2011, she’ll start classes at Harvard, and said she feels like she’s been waiting for college her whole life. “I love to learn.”

After a year abroad – including a hike from the Andes down into the Amazon with a cultural study program called Where There Be Dragons and a home stay in Shanghai – she plans to study something related to environmental science at Harvard.

She said she will connect with environmental groups there and hopes that it will be an opportunity to expand the scope of the conservation work she’s done since she was 12 years old – work that recently earned her national recognition.

On Sept. 28, Maxmin was named one of 10 national winners of the Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes.

Each year, the Barron Prize, founded in 2001, honors 10 American youths between 8 and 18 years old “who have made a significant positive difference to people and our planet,” according to a press release issued by the Barron organization. Winners receive \$2,500 for their higher education or to help fund a service project.

Maxmin received the award for her work with the Climate Action Club, a group she founded at Lincoln Academy to help fight global warming.

In two years, the CAC established a no idling policy on the LA campus, recycled 4000 batteries and won a \$5,000 grand-prize national community impact award sponsored by Best Buy that is being used to fund the installation of solar panels on the school roof.

“The special thing is that the project was entirely student run,” Maxmin said. “The power of youth is often underestimated, but young people can truly make a difference.”

The most notable of the CAC’s programs is a reusable shopping bag campaign that saves 700,000 plastic bags from landfills each year, Maxmin said.

The CAC started the program – the only one of its kind in the country – by raising \$4,300 from local businesses and bought 1,900 reusable shopping bags featuring the sponsors, and the CAC's, logos. The bags went on sale in 13 locations and sold out quickly. The program continues, using the profits from each year to fund a new round of bag purchases.

Hannaford Brothers, Maine's largest supermarket chain, has since taken on sponsorship of the program and now sells the bags. Maine has also launched a statewide reusable bag campaign using Damariscotta and the CAC as the model.

"It emphasizes that one person actually can make a difference," Maxmin said. "Even though a person is acting locally, their work will spread and inspire other people."

That idea drove her to create "First Here, Then Everywhere," an online network for young environmentalists. The site, which has now spread to eight countries, features the work of young environmentalists and provides a social hub for activists to connect and collaborate.

Maxmin began her work as an environmentalist when she was 12 years old.

Along with her father, Jim, and brother, Jake, Maxmin took annual trips to snowmobile at Moosehead Lake. On one of those trips, she learned of a massive housing development proposed by the Plum Creek Development Company, to be built on the shore of the lake.

"That's when I realized I was going to spend the rest of my life working to preserve the environment," Maxmin said. "The environment is the foundation, and everything we do is connected to the planet."

She spent the next five years fighting that development, which Plum Creek only recently abandoned. During that fight, Maxmin worked closely with the Natural Resources Council of Maine, which she credits with helping her develop her writing and organizing skills.

Maxmin has no plans to abandon her environmental work, and judging by her track record, the world may not be done hearing about her.

"The goal is to mitigate our impact. It's really about ensuring that people are mindful, and changing people's behavior," she said. "If the world falls apart, I don't want to be the one who stood by and watched it happen."