

4th grader does his part to save the forests

www.DavidsonNews.net
by Brenda Barger
November 2, 2010



Imagine being nine years old and already featured in “Ranger Rick” magazine as well as being named one of 10 national winners of the Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes. Not at all hard to imagine when you meet Cole Rasenberger and hear his plans to make the world better.

Cole, the son of Ken and Kerry Rasenberger, was a student at Mountain Island Elementary School last year when his Talent Development (TD) teacher asked each class member to write to a government official on behalf of an endangered species. Eight years old at the time, Cole decided not to focus on an individual animal but rather on an entire forest ecosystem: Southern forests. He contacted the Dogwood Alliance (www.dogwoodalliance.org) and learned from them

that many of our trees are used to make paper for fast food restaurants.

Maybe they should be using recycled paper instead, he thought. He started a postcard campaign using his hand-drawn artwork to represent four different forest habitats. With a team of 24 students, Cole took the postcard campaign to every classroom of Mountain Island Elementary with the resulting mass mailing of over 1,100 cards, bringing a response from McDonald’s that they would soon switch their bags to 100 percent recycled paper. Cole’s young age, good organization and great enthusiasm caught the attention of *Ranger Rick* magazine (March 2010 issue, “Kids in Action” page) and then the honor of the \$2,500 Gloria Barron Prize last month.

The Barron Prize was founded in 2001 and selects 10 winners nationwide annually. Half the winners have focused on helping their communities and fellow human beings; half have focused on protecting the health and sustainability of the environment.

Ken and Kerry Rasenberger, with Cole and younger daughter, Kaela (2nd grade), moved to Davidson this past July and guess what: As a fourth grader at Davidson Elementary School, he already has his sights set on organizing a new mass mailing of postcards to another fast food company using some of the prize money from the Barron award for his materials. This fall he has the help of classmate and neighbor, Liam Donoghue, son of Marnie and Tom Donoghue.

Liam and Cole are sharing responsibility for the artwork on the newest batch of 10,000 cards (printed on recycled paper of course). The boys have established a time line and hope to involve other elementary schools to help their cause of protecting our coastal forests. Cole

and Liam anticipate having the cards signed and mailed by the end of this year—but they are realistic and know their time line may have to be tweaked a bit.

When these boys are not planning strategies to improve our environment, they enjoy sports, exploring the woods and in particular they love to bounce on the trampoline in Liam's backyard. Chances are we will be hearing a lot more about Cole's Cause in the months to come. If you have some ideas or suggestions for this project, be sure to email Cole at cole1105@earthlink.net.