

2007 Barron Prize Winners and Honorees

E = environmental project

WINNERS

Austin, Age 13, Arizona

Austin founded Hoops of Hope, an annual basketball shoot-a-thon in which kids around the world have raised over \$130,000 to help children in Africa orphaned by AIDS. Austin first learned of Africa's fifteen million AIDS orphans through his family's sponsorship of two Ugandan children. Determined to do his part to help, Austin spoke with the relief organization World Vision, and realized he could use his love of basketball to help address the problem. He decided to shoot free throws and ask people to sponsor him with donations. That first year, at the age of 10, Austin shot 2,057 free throws to benefit the 2,057 children that would be orphaned by AIDS during his school day. Every shot that went up represented a child.

Austin raised \$3,000 that day, and realized that by involving more kids, he could make an even bigger difference. He went out and recruited 1,000 kids to each shoot 1,000 free throws, and Hoops of Hope was born. With the help of World Vision, Austin created a web site to encourage even more kids to get involved. Every December 1, on World AIDS day, thousands of kids across the U.S., Europe, and Australia shoot free throws to help Austin's cause. They have raised money to fund a school and an AIDS testing lab in Zambia, a country hit hard by the AIDS crisis. "You don't have to wait to be an adult to make a difference," says Austin. "Just pick your passion and do something!"

Additional Media Coverage

Weekly Reader News – 5/2/2008

Time for Kids – 11/16/2007

Chad, Age 18, North Carolina

An outspoken advocate for teen tobacco-use prevention, Chad led a campaign to have Kool Mixx cigarettes – marketed almost exclusively to teens – pulled from shelves nationwide. Living in the heart of tobacco country, Chad is surrounded by tobacco warehouses, manufacturers, and advertisements. He is also surrounded by family members who smoke, and has lost relatives to lung cancer. When Chad learned of Kool Mixx's hip-hop based marketing campaign, which he believed was targeting minorities and teens, he organized his peers and began his crusade.

Chad, Age 18, North Carolina, continued

His group, North Carolina Against Kool Mixx Cigarettes, visited merchants in close proximity to schools and in communities of color, gathering information on the marketing and promotion of Kool Mixx special edition packs. They wrote North Carolina's Attorney General, asking for help, and signed their letter with thousands of their peers' signatures. A lawsuit followed and within a few months, the Kool Mixx cigarettes were pulled from shelves. Chad is continuing his work for tobacco-use prevention as a youth advocate for the national Campaign for Tobacco-Free kids. He is currently meeting with the restaurant chain Golden Corral to convince the entire chain to go smoke-free. "A group of teens challenged a major tobacco company and won," says Chad. "Youth truly do have a voice, and can have a powerful effect on society."

Darius, Age 17, Georgia

Darius created a 90-minute documentary film to raise awareness of and money toward a cure for Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy (DMD). Darius has DMD, the most aggressive type of Muscular Dystrophy, from which his brother died at age 19. Since then, Darius has searched for a way to let other people know about the disease. Three years ago, he landed on a creative plan to do just that. He and a friend, Logan Smalley, were watching MTV's "Pimp My Ride," in which old cars are re-vamped. Hoping that MTV might want to re-vamp Darius's old and unreliable wheelchair, the boys decided to take a cross-country trip to Los Angeles, to knock on MTV's door and pose their idea in person. Darius realized they could film the trip, and use it to educate people about both DMD and accessibility challenges facing the disabled.

Darius and a group of friends spent months organizing the trip and raising money for it, and then set out to film "Darius Goes West." The film documents their travels across the U.S. – Darius's first trip outside his hometown – and the accessibility challenges they encountered. It has won numerous awards at film festivals around the world, and has raised thousands of dollars toward a cure for DMD. Darius, now considered an emerging leader in the field of disability rights, travels extensively to speak about the film, DMD, and accessibility. "I can't believe we were able to do this," says Darius. "I've learned that I can get things done. I can make the world better."

Website/Social Media

www.DariusGoesWest.org

Additional Media Coverage

WR Current Health 2 – Apr/May 2008

Evan, Age 11, California (E)

Evan formed the Red Dragons Conservation Team to encourage children to become stewards of nature through the purchase and protection of rainforests and coral reefs. When he was seven years old, Evan contacted the San Francisco-based Center for Ecosystem Survival and began fundraising for Bowl the Planet, the Center's annual event offering Adopt an Acre and Adopt a Reef programs. With his fundraising, Evan quickly learned two things that surprised him: that other people cared as much as he did for the environment, and that adults would listen to kids. This discovery led him to create the Red Dragons Conservation Team, as a way to share his passion for conservation with other kids.

Evan chose the name Red Dragons because he considers the mythical beast as being "all about possibilities." Each year, Evan's group asks classmates, neighbors, and local businesses to sponsor their bowling team, which has raised enough money to purchase over sixteen acres of threatened habitat in Costa Rica. Evan has also launched the Red Dragons Conservation Team website. The site reminds kids that "every little bit counts," and has inspired children across the country to raise money for conservation efforts. Evan continues his fundraising and outreach, despite a rare and sometimes debilitating intestinal disorder. "The Red Dragons are saving the homes of jaguars, spider monkeys, orchids, sea turtles, and thousands of butterflies," says Evan. "You don't have to be an adult to make a difference."

Additional Media Coverage

Weekly Reader News – 11/9/2007

Jane, Age 17, Massachusetts

Jane created A Book for Mom, a program that has provided over 9,000 new books to incarcerated parents to share with their children during prison visits. Jane, a book-lover with fond memories of reading with her mom growing up, launched the project as a way to share her passion for books, encourage literacy, and strengthen family bonds. She presented her idea to the only women's prison in Massachusetts, not far from where she lives, and was met with full enthusiasm. The prison began setting up bookshelves, and Jane got busy soliciting donations of new books. She approached Barnes and Noble bookstore and established a unique partnership in which holiday shoppers can purchase books for her program at a discount. Jane also receives new books from schools, church groups, service clubs, and individuals – so many books that she has expanded her program to include A Book for Dad at two other prisons and two pre-release facilities.

Jane has certainly accomplished her goal of promoting literacy and strengthening family bonds; prison personnel report that parents spend hours perusing bookshelves as they pick out books for their children, and then inscribe them with heartfelt messages. "I've learned that leading a project like this involves persistence and problem solving," says Jane. "And it involves staying true to your vision."

Additional Media Coverage

WR Current Health 2 – Apr/May 2008

Kayla, Age 17, Ontario

Kayla has created a music-based teaching system called Sounds into Syllables that helps autistic children communicate and develop social skills. Four years ago, Kayla began researching autism to determine if there might be a way to use autistic children's affinity for music to teach them to communicate. She was inspired by her young autistic cousin, who at age seven did not know the alphabet and was unable to read or spell. Kayla envisioned a system that would apply the musical component of pitch to the process of learning letters and words. Sounds into Syllables presents the 26 letters of the alphabet as different musical sounds, and then builds to include 26 different nouns (animal names) and 26 verbs (animal noises). The system includes a book, workbook, and computer program.

Kayla piloted the program with her cousin, who in less than a year had learned the alphabet and how to spell and read over twenty animal nouns. Currently, fifteen Canadian schools are piloting the program in a six-month study with other autistic children, with very promising results so far. Kayla has a patent pending for Sounds into Syllables, and has presented her program at numerous science fairs and to government agencies, hospitals, school boards, and businesses. "Watching my young cousin at family gatherings sparked a desire in me to try to help her cope with autism," says Kayla. "I want to help her and others like her participate more fully in the world around them."

Additional Media Coverage

WR Current Health 2 – Apr/May 2008

Weekly Reader Science – 1/2008

Kelydra, Age 18, West Virginia (E)

Kelydra has invented a test that removes a potential carcinogen from contaminated drinking water in her hometown along the Ohio River. The water there contains the world's highest concentration of APFO, a chemical by-product of Teflon, which is manufactured by the local DuPont plant. For years, the manufacturer and environmental groups have argued over the long-term effects of exposure to APFO; DuPont recently paid \$100 million dollars to settle a lawsuit and to pay EPA fines. Rather than enter the debate over APFO's toxicity, Kelydra decided it was more important to simply remove the chemical from the town's drinking water.

A science enthusiast, she began experimenting with ways to check for the presence of APFO in water and within two months, had landed on a successful method. From there, she tackled the tough job of removing and recovering the chemical from contaminated water – all in her lab converted from an old house trailer. Kelydra's test takes only 30 minutes, is 92% accurate, and costs just pennies, compared to existing testing that can amount to \$3,000. She has won international acclaim for her work, ruffled a few feathers at DuPont, and has several patents pending. "Many people here are angry, hurt, and confused over the issue of APFO in their water," says Kelydra. "I'm in an excellent position to simplify the science and to help."

Molly and Carly, Ages 15 and 13, Pennsylvania (E)

Molly and Carly founded Hives for Lives, a non-profit organization that sells honey and honey products, and donates all profits to the American Cancer Society – \$22,000 to date. Carly and Molly, who grew up helping with their grandparents' beekeeping hobby, started Hives for Lives in 2004, as a way to honor their grandfather, who died that year of cancer. Determined to turn their grief into something positive, the sisters decided to harvest the honey from their family's bee hives, and sell it to raise money for cancer research. The girls added beeswax candles and lip balm to their product line, created a web site, and came up with a slogan – “Bee the cure we seek.”

Assisted by a team of their peers (volunteer Bee Helpers), the girls harvest, filter and jar the honey; mold the beeswax into honey bear candles and lip balms; and package and ship their products all over the country. When demand outgrew the capacity of their family's hives, the girls approached nearby Dutch Gold, the second-largest honey producer in the U.S., and secured additional honey from them. They also supplement with honey donations from 4H clubs, and other similar partners. “It feels so good to accomplish your goals and help change the world in some way,” says Carly. “We have to figure out how to make a mark on the world – to make our difference,” adds Molly.

Nick, Age 18, District of Columbia (E)

Nick developed Stop e-Waste in D.C., a program that has recycled more than 40,000 pounds of computers, printers, cell phones, and other electronics over the past two years. Nick started his project after learning that Americans threw out nearly 63 million computers in 2005 alone. When he found out that Washington, D.C. provides only two days each year to dispose of electronics in a non-hazardous way, he decided to get busy with a program of his own, and started with his school. He advertised that if people dropped off old printer cartridges, laptops, and cell phones on his front porch, he'd take care of recycling them. He partnered with Cartridges for Kids, which pays a small fee for each recycled item, and began donating the checks he received to Susan G. Komen for the Cure.

He soon expanded beyond his school community to the entire D.C. metro area, and began accepting computer hardware – CPUs, printers, monitors, faxes, and small copy machines. Donations poured in and overflowed from the porch into the basement. Nick stacked the items on pallets, wrapped them in shrink-wrap, and arranged for shipments to a recycler. He also rented vans to pick up equipment from the elderly, and donated refurbished computers to low-income students. Nick has collected nearly 5,500 items and has raised \$1,842 for Susan G. Komen For the Cure. “I've learned that an individual can educate a community about a problem, and work with it to create a solution,” says Nick.

Additional Media Coverage

Washington Post – 12/6/2007

Savannah, Age 14, Florida (E)

Savannah founded Pump 'em Up, a non-profit organization that encourages drivers to conserve gas by properly inflating their tires. Savannah was inspired to start her program in the second grade, after studying and falling in love with the Arctic – and then learning of the push to drill for oil in the Arctic Refuge. She learned that Americans waste four million gallons of gas every day – more than drilling in the Refuge could ever produce – just by driving on under-inflated tires.

Wondering why people didn't just "pump 'em up," Savannah decided to launch a campaign to help people "save gas and save the planet." She created a web site that includes environmental facts, tips on properly inflating tires, gas mileage worksheets, and information to help others host "Pump 'em Up" events in their communities. Over the past seven years, Savannah has sent more than 10,000 tire gauges to hundreds of school, Scout, and church groups interested in helping her spread her message. She has also lobbied in Washington, spoken to a crowd of 5,000 on the West Lawn of the Capitol, and met with Senators Clinton, Kerry, and McCain, among others. "I've learned that when you really care about something, telling people about it is easy," says Savannah. "Young people have to stand up for what they believe in."

HONOREES

Afton, Age 18, Maryland: Afton created a company called SAFEH2OWEST, which provides inexpensive water testing and education to homeowners who obtain their drinking water from wells.

Dallas, Age 15, Washington: Dallas created a film and website called Just Yell Fire to teach girls self-defense, also mailing over 10,000 free copies of the film to interested people around the world. www.JustYellFire.com

Elizabeth, Age 18, Washington: Elizabeth founded Under the Roof Reading Begins, a program that has provided home libraries for over 100 families living in Habitat for Humanity homes.

Esteban, Age 9, Texas: Esteban organized the Joshua Book Project, raising \$4,000 to buy 400 books for his school in memory of his friend and reading buddy, Joshua.

Folake, Age 18, Illinois: Folake started the Birthday Party Project, which organizes surprise birthday parties for children from low-income families.

Gwenn, Age 14, New York: Gwenn organized a unique evening of international dance and dining that raised over \$10,000 to bring a Sudanese refugee woman and her child to the United States.

Hannah, Age 11, Manitoba: Hannah founded the LadyBug Foundation which has raised over one million dollars to help Canada's hungry and homeless. www.LadyBugFoundation.ca

James, Age 16, New York: James builds and maintains numerous bird nesting boxes at two parks on Staten Island, working closely with Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

Janna, Age 17, New Jersey: Janna founded the Michelle Offsie Memorial Walk for Hope to Cure Breast Cancer, an annual walk that has raised over \$350,000 in the past six years.

Julia, Age 18, Texas: Julia led a group of her peers in raising nearly \$30,000 to fund schools for children in Northern Uganda.

Kyle, Age 18, Hawaii: Kyle developed Kids Helping Kids with Diabetes, a program that has raised over \$43,000 for the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation.

Marni, Age 16, California: Marni created Kid Flicks, a non-profit group that has donated over 21,000 movies to children's hospitals across the country.

Tayler, Age 13, Illinois: Tayler has collected and recycled over 18,000 pounds of aluminum, donating all proceeds — more than \$10,000 — to a local chapter of Habitat for Humanity.

Taylor, Age 18, Arkansas: Taylor started a TOPS (The Outreach Program for Soccer) program in his town, allowing children with disabilities the chance to play organized recreational soccer.