

Never too Young to Change the World

By Wade Wallerstein

At the tender age of eight years old, **Pavan Raj Gowda** decided that he would change the world. His passion for our planet's well-being and dedication to building a more sustainable future led him to found **Green Kids Now**, a youth conference with the central mission of, as Gowda put it, "encouraging our next generation to responsibly innovate."

"I was doing a lot of self-study and doing research after school hours, to learn more about all the environmental issues and about the solutions that already exist. It is so time consuming," he explained. I thought why not create an event where young people could come together in a non-commercialized setting to learn about new developments in the field of sustainability and teach others about various resources available to take action? And thus, the Green Kids Conference was born.

With no prior knowledge about how to host and fund such a massive event, Gowda had his work cut out for him.

"At first, envisioning the need for a conference for kids and getting a sponsor to help make this vision a reality was the most difficult task. I had to work really hard in the beginning to convince people and organizations to believe in my vision



A COLLAGE OF PAVAN'S RECENT PARK CLEANUP ACTIVITY WITH FEW OTHER VOLUNTEERS, AT THE NATURE AREA, "STIVERS LAGOON" IN FREMONT.

and come forward to participate. There were several rejections and very few supporters," he said.

Eventually, by networking through his mother, Shanti Balaraman, Gowda was able to convince **Microsoft** to donate their conference center to the first Green Kids Conference. "Microsoft also provided me with some of their staff. It helped tremendously to reach out to the community like this ... a few more supporters even came forward," he said. With no money to print physical fliers, Gowda earned most of his publicity through e-mail and social media outlets. His work paid off. "Ultimately over eight hundred people attended the first conference!" Gowda added.

The annual Green Kids Conference, held exclusively for entrants under the age of eighteen, showcases works in all areas pertaining to the environment, earth systems and living "green." Monetary awards were presented for first, second and third place prizes, as

well participatory prizes to ten exemplary groups. This year's conference on June 1 was held at the **Microsoft Silicon Valley Campus** in Mountain View.

Now, at age twelve, Gowda holds a professional membership position in the **North America Association**

of Environmental Education, has authored two children's stories and acts as Green Kids Now, Inc.'s principal lead. An eloquent speaker and powerful orator, Pavan frequently lectures at schools around the area. He teaches them how to become a "Green Star School," with focus in five major areas: nature preservation, water conservation and preservation, energy conservation and alternative resources, becoming a zero-waste school and planting a school garden. All areas of the plan stem from innovation, utilizing science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Gowda's guidance emphasizes incorporating innovation with leadership, teamwork and collaboration to foster a strong environmentally friendly community.

Green Kids Inc. holds numerous events, including Earth Day fairs; park, creek and coastline cleanups; recycling activities; workshops about planting and maintaining trees; and used clothing, books and e-waste drives.



PAVAN RECEIVES JOHN MUIR ASSOCIATION'S, "YOUTH ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CONSERVATION AWARD". LEFT TO RIGHT: JOANNE DUNEC (PRESIDENT, JOHN MUIR ASSOCIATION), PAVAN RAJ GOWDA, TOM LEATHERMAN (GENERAL SUPERINTENDENT, CONTRA COSTA COUNTY), AND GEORGE MILLER (CONGRESSMAN)

You can get involved with Green Kids by donating time,

space or money to the cause. Their budget is extremely small and increased resources will help them expand their services for youth. You can invite Gowda to come to your school or business by emailing info@greenkidsconference.org.

Gowda's advice to anyone with an environmental consciousness is this, "Caring for our surroundings and making good choices in our everyday lives doesn't always need to be scientific or complicated; observing our own actions and the consequences helps us to be more careful. Raising awareness is very important; if each of us makes small changes, it all adds up and makes a huge impact."

- Wade Wallerstein is a senior at *Los Gatos School* and is the editor-in-chief of the school newspaper, *El Gato News*. He works part time as an assistant manager at *American Apparel*, fostering his interests in style and design, and is an intern at *KCAT TV 15*. He lives in *Los Gatos* with his two parents and is the eldest of their three children. Undecided as of now, Wade hopes to attend a university close to his childhood home on the East Coast.



INNOVATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE

<http://blog.epa.gov/students/2013/05/innovation-and-environmental-science/>

More blogs by Pavan on EPA site:
<http://blog.epa.gov/students/?s=pavan>

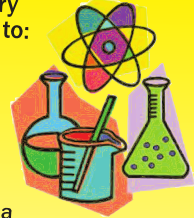
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www.greenkidsnow.org

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