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## Fremont teen wins green awards, on mission to help the environment

By **Chris De Benedetti**  
The Argus

Posted: 04/28/2013 12:00:00 AM PDT  
Updated: 04/28/2013 07:42:07 AM PDT

FREMONT -- For as long as he can remember, Pavan Raj Gowda has understood the critical danger of living on a polluted planet and the importance of nursing it back to health.

"When I was really little, I would see garbage on the highway and wonder why it was there," the Fremont 13-year-old said. "I've always been passionate about the planet. I'm not sure why."

Pavan has been on a mission to educate people about pollution and his efforts now have been noticed. Last week, he received the President's Environmental Youth Award, which the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency awards to kids nationwide who promote a healthy ecology.

Pavan's dedication to the green cause began soon after he first noticed that garbage on the highway.



Pavan Gowda, 13, of Fremont, and students from the Prashanti Arts Studio, work on a sculpture made of plastic caps in Fremont, Calif., on Thursday, April 25, 2013. Gowda's sculpture highlights the fact that plastic caps are not recyclable. The 7th-grader, whose passion is the environment, has also founded the "Green Kids Now, Inc.," nonprofit, written two kids' books and received the EPA's 2012 President's Environmental Youth Award. (Doug Duran/Bay Area News Group)

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Pavan Gowda, 13, of Fremont, left, with the help of students from the Prashanti Arts Studio and...



Now a seventh-grader at Centerville Junior High, Pavan founded Green Kids Now, Inc., a nonprofit organization seeking to raise awareness on green issues, when he was eight. He has written blogs for the EPA and other websites and has been a correspondent for an Australian children's radio program called Primary Perspectives. He created a list of criteria that schools across the nation can follow to qualify for the international Green Star Award.

He hosts an annual "Green Kids Conference," a fair that teaches students and their families about environmental issues. The conference drew 800 people last year, the next one is scheduled for June 1 in Mountain View.

He authored a pair of children's books.

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"Two Tales from a Kid" encourages children to be kind to one another and the environment. "Geckoboy: The Battle of Fracking" aims to teach kids about the destructive consequences of fracking, when energy companies drill and inject fluid into the ground in order to fracture shale to release natural gas.

Pavan's curiosity about green issues has never wavered, said his mother, Shanti Balaraman.

"He had so many questions when he was little and I told him he needed to find the answers himself," Balaraman said. "So, he started interviewing park rangers about Lake Elizabeth in Fremont, asking them about duck habitats and geese migration."

Balaraman said Pavan is able to stay so busy because he completes work very quickly. "As a mom, I look to see if he is getting stressed out, but he still has time to play basketball and video games," she said.

Pavan now is creating a sculpture made from bottle caps, using art to let people know that the caps are not recyclable and, hence, an environmental hazard. The artwork will be showcased at the next Green Kids Conference and later donated to the city of Fremont, Balaraman said.

Perhaps because of his long list of accomplishments, Pavan has faced some teasing from classmates. But he said he tends to shrug that off.

"I know that I cannot convince everyone to care about the environment," he said. "I leave those who don't want to listen behind, and I join together with those who really care. All I want is my generation and future generations to live."

Last week, Pavan's work garnered another honor – the John Muir Association gave him the Youth Environmental Conservation Award.

"Now it will be easier to reach out to more kids and do even more," he said of his awards. "Now people will take me more seriously."

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Nekkanti Prashanti, the owner of Prashanti Arts Studio, uses a hot glue gun on a plastic cap before placing it on a sculpture made by Pavan Gowda, 13, in Fremont, Calif., on Thursday, April 25, 2013. Gowda's sculpture, made with the help from students from the Prashanti Arts Studio, highlights the fact that plastic caps are not recyclable. The 7th-grader, whose passion is the environment, has also founded the "Green Kids Now, Inc.," nonprofit, written two kids' books and received the EPA's 2012 President's Environmental Youth Award. (Doug Duran/Bay Area News Group)



Pavan Gowda, 13, of Fremont, left, with the help of students from the Prashanti Arts Studio and parents, work on a sculpture made of plastic caps in Fremont, Calif., on Thursday, April 25, 2013. Gowda's sculpture highlights the fact that plastic caps are not recyclable. The 7th-grader, whose passion is the environment, has also founded the "Green Kids Now, Inc.," nonprofit, written two kids' books and received the EPA's 2012 President's Environmental Youth Award. (Doug Duran/Bay Area News Group)