

Earth Angels

By Lisa Collier Cool
Family Circle
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family

EARTH angels

BY MAKING IT THEIR MISSION TO PROTECT OUR WATER, WILDLIFE AND MORE, THESE FOUR TEENS AND TWEENS ARE INSPIRING A NEW GENERATION TO STEP UP AND SAVE THE PLANET. BY LISA COLLIER COOL

ZANDER SRODES, 16

“Sea turtles need our help to survive.”

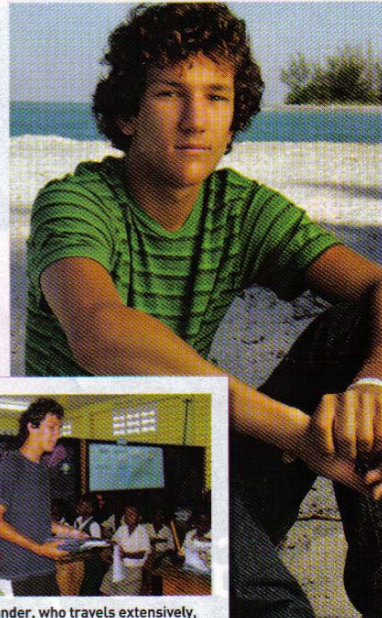
Five years ago Zander Srodes noticed a woman combing the beach near his home on Palm Island, Florida. “I’d see her almost every day, looking at the sand and writing stuff in a notebook,” he says. “Finally I got so curious that I asked what she was doing. She turned out to be a volunteer who keeps track of loggerhead sea turtle nests.” When the woman, Linda Soderquist, told the 11-year-old that the prehistoric reptiles were threatened, he was so shocked and saddened that he decided to become a loggerhead lobbyist. With help from his mom, Jean, he applied to the Gulf Coast Community Foundation of Venice, a Florida group that offers grants for environmental education programs, and was awarded \$950. Zander bought a laptop and prepared a PowerPoint presentation, then whipped up a turtle costume, using a hula hoop as a frame for a fabric shell and a baseball helmet for a skull. He gave the first of his “Turtle Talks” in 2001 at a nearby elementary school. “I brought a sandbox

and Ping-Pong balls so kids could bury them in the sand and see how turtles lay their eggs,” says Zander, who also had a student don the costume so he could give a loggerhead anatomy lesson.

Now 16, Zander has become a local celebrity who speaks at schools throughout Sarasota County, nature festivals and on live Internet broadcasts. He’s also written a children’s activity book and has given away some 30,000 copies to schools, libraries and wildlife groups. But he’s really psyched about a recent honor. “I just found out that a Florida aquarium named one of its sea turtles after me,” he says. “Awesome!”

MOST MEMORABLE MOMENT

“The first time I saw a leatherback sea turtle. When they come up on land they look like they’re crying. They’re really excreting salt from their bodies. But it makes them seem so human.” *(continued)*



Zander, who travels extensively, gives a “Turtle Talk” in Trinidad.

ANIMAL AID Don’t litter at the beach, especially in or near the water. Plastic bags pose a serious hazard for sea turtles, who mistake them for jellyfish and eat them; they often starve to death when the plastic blocks the opening to their stomach. Many species of birds, fish, seals, porpoises and even whales also suffer when they ingest plastic bags.