

## **The Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes: Recognizing Tomorrow's Leaders**

### **Orion Online Profile/Featured Group February 2004**

At a time when the environment desperately needs our help, young people across the country are stepping up to show us what grassroots activism can look like. Youth are speaking up to protest what they see happening to the planet and are coming up with creative, effective ways to protect it. The Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes proudly honors these sorts of young activists, and offers these profiles of three such environmental heroes:



Barbara Brown:  
founder of "Don't be Crude"

### **Groundwater protected**

“Whatever you pour on the ground around here gets into the water we drink,” says Barbara Brown, age 17, of rural Texas. Several years ago, Barbara and two of her friends were bothered to see local farmers pouring used motor oil on the ground in order to kill weeds.

They decided to give farmers another way to get rid of the oil, and “Don't Be Crude” was born. The girls worked with county commissioners and local sponsors to place five federally-approved motor oil recycling units in their county. Today, their program has

expanded to seven counties, with over 18 recycling units that have collected 60,000 gallons of used motor oil. Barbara and the “Don't Be Crude Team” also work continuously to educate adults and children about groundwater protection. In the past five years, the girls have spoken to over 100 audiences across the country, from local civic groups to schools in Washington, D.C. “I know that with support and creativity, we can create solutions to environmental challenges and inspire others to do the same,” says Barbara.

## State law changed

Amir Nadav's concern for air quality has resulted in a new Minnesota state law that greatly reduces children's exposure to diesel emissions. Amir, age 18 of Eagan, Minnesota, first became interested in the issue at a Sierra Club meeting in December 2001, where he learned about the toxins and carcinogens in diesel exhaust that students breathe regularly on school buses. He immediately drafted a petition and gathered 1,500 student signatures in support of new state legislation to reduce children's exposure to diesel emissions. With the help of the Sierra Club and fellow students, Amir then organized a rally of 150 students on the steps of the Minnesota state capitol where he presented his petition to the Senate Majority Leader. He also testified in front of the state Senate, wrote newspaper editorials, and did numerous television and radio interviews. Thanks to Amir's work, in May 2002 the state of Minnesota passed a law that requires schools to adopt no bus-idling practices and redesign air-intake vents and/or bus parking zones. Based on Amir's model, the Sierra Student Coalition, the student-run arm of the Sierra Club, has begun a national campaign to get similar legislation passed in other states. "I've learned that making a difference is often an arduous path full of obstacles and setbacks," admits Amir. "Still, the sense of fulfillment makes it worth every bit of effort."



Press conference for clean air:  
Amir Nadav

## Wetland protected

Bethany Larue, age 18 of Groveport, Ohio, saved a six-acre wetland on her family farm from destruction by Marathon-Ashland Petroleum, a multi-billion dollar oil company. After learning that a proposed pipeline would destroy "her" wetland and many others, Bethany began a determined effort to stop or re-route the pipeline. Despite being told repeatedly that she'd never win in taking on a large corporation, Bethany plowed onward. She contacted the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, who worked with her to survey and monitor the wetland. In the process, they discovered an endangered plant and were able to force the re-routing of the pipeline. "Everyone can defend the environment, whether you're 15 or 75 years old," says Bethany. "You can make a difference."



Bethany Larue:  
conservation hero