

The launch of RelightNY



Matilda Cuomo with (back row, l. to r.) Peter Chapin, Daniel Bernstein, Taiki Kasuga, Avery Hairston and (front row, l. to r.) Stephen Todres, Jack Schlossberg, Will Pagano, and Brendan Harvey.

*Lots of kids have ideas to make the world a better place, but the lucky ones live in New York, where sympathetic adults can help them make dreams come true. Like **Avery Hairston**. Two years ago, when he was just 13, he was taken to **Al Gore's** "Inconvenient Truth" slide show. Afterwards, he wondered: "Why aren't people doing simple things to help?"*

*Last year he saw a Starbucks ad in **The New York Times** that preached the gospel of energy-saving compact fluorescent light (CFL) bulbs. He learned that CFLs use two-thirds less energy and last ten times longer. The problem is that these bulbs are much more expensive.*

The rich can buy CFLs without feeling the pinch. People on the margins can't. At 15, Avery saw his mission: to get these bulbs to New Yorkers who live in housing projects. He talked the idea up at the Collegiate School, where he's in the 9th grade, and he and some of his friends formed RelightNY.

Right there is where most kid projects get stalled, but Avery's father, Charles Hairston, was an award-winning TV producer and his mother, **Sara Levinson**, once ran MTV, NFL Properties and women's publishing at Rodale. Their Rolodexes were not small.

Soon RelightNY had a media supporter: his mother's friend and former co-worker, **Bob Jeffrey**, CEO of **JWT** (the advertising agency known for a century as J. Walter Thompson). A lawyer: **Richard Beattie**, chairman of Simpson Thacher. An organizational adviser: the Natural Resources Defense Council. A fiscal sponsor: the Open Space Institute. **Maria Cuomo Cole's** Help USA offered to distribute the bulbs. And Philips offered to sell them to RelightNY at cost. Also on board: Virgin Mobile, LiveEarth and Rodale.



Bob Jeffrey with the RelightNY boys

*Last week, I went down to **JWT** for the launch of RelightNY and its website (www.RelightNY.com). Avery was there with most of his Collegiate advisory board—**Daniel Bernstein**, **Peter Chapin**, **Peter Ginsberg**, **Brendan Harvey**, **Taiki Kasuga**, **Will Pagano**, **Jack Schlossberg**, and **Stephen Todres**—and their parents and supporters.*

The boys were irresistible: smart, confident, articulate. And reverse-stylish—they all wore their generation's official private school uniform: untucked (and, often as not, unironed) white shirt, tie loose at the collar, baggy jeans and no-logo sneakers. No wonder Matilda Cuomo, in her remarks, noted that these were just the boys she wanted her twelve granddaughters to meet.

Avery was the master of ceremonies. Unlike his posse, he's a goofball; he cracks himself up. Considering how serious people get about The Environment, his levity was a welcome relief. I took my free bulb and, as soon as I got home, screwed it in. I imagine everyone these kids corner—and thousands of housing project residents—will do the same.