



BOB JEFFREY

## Teens Inspiring Action

In Thomas Friedman's seminal work *The World Is Flat*, one of the premises that captured my attention was Friedman's focus and emphasis on education—both in the U.S. and in the rest of the world. It's certainly true that “children are our future;” how they are prepared for that future needs to be a concern of us all. As he writes: “For my money, they could engrave on the doorway of every school in America: Nobody works harder at learning than a curious kid.” A concept that's certainly a long way from the rote learning that continues to pervade America's educational infrastructure.

With that in mind, I was especially heartened to learn about—and subsequently got **JWT** involved as a sponsor in—the world-changing efforts of 15-year-old Avery Hairston, a student at New York's highly competitive Collegiate School, a private high school. Although he was reluctant to attend the presentation at first, he was so inspired by Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* that he couldn't stop thinking about the issues facing the environment. Later, Avery saw an advertisement by Starbucks in *The New York Times* that said if every person who received the newspaper switched one light bulb to a compact fluorescent light (CFL) bulb, it would be the equivalent of taking 89,000 cars off the road. That ad compelled Avery to think big: He set out to convince everyone to make the switch.

The bulb lasts 10 times longer than a conventional one and uses roughly two-thirds less energy—but it does cost a lot more upfront than the incandescent standard. And while Avery understood he could probably persuade the families of his immediate circle to make the change, he quickly recognized that critical mass was, well, critical. How to “materialize” the idea? Create a program that would buy the bulbs for the residents of New York City's housing projects in an effort to educate and inspire everyone to switch to CFL bulbs.

As soon as his peers learned about his idea, they wanted to know how they could help. A teen advisory board of eight additional members was quickly formed. To rally other young people around their cause, they turned to social networking site Facebook. In less than 30 days, they had over 500 members.

With help from his parents, Avery received support from the Natural Resources Defense Council to assist with organization and logistical assistance, the Open Space Institute to handle fiscal responsibilities, HELP USA to distribute light bulbs to its low-income housing facilities, Philips (the world's largest manufacturer of light bulbs) to supply the bulbs at a discounted price, and JWT, fully committed to using our resources to help get the word out.

**RelightNY** (not a bad name) launches on March 23. Check it out at [relightny.com](http://relightny.com).

You might well be thinking, Where is the business world on this idea? On March 14, *The New York Times* reported the formation of a new coalition composed of the very same Natural Resources Defense Council, Philips, and two energy-efficiency organizations with a mission to eliminate the incandescent bulb in 10 years' time. Further, the *Times* wrote on January 2, 2007 about Wal-Mart's aggressive initiative to promote CFL bulbs in favor of incandescents, even in the face of resistance from manufacturers, competitors, and customers. The initiative is a personal passion of Wal-Mart CEO H. Lee Scott, who has been widely noted for his commitment to reductions in energy use. In the year ending August 2006, the discount chain had sold 40 million CFLs, compared to 350 million incandescents. It is committed to selling 100 million by 2008.

Here's hoping (and frankly, expecting) that RelightNY will show the way.



Avery Hairston (bottom row, second from right) and his RelightNY teen advisory board.

Back row (left to right): Stephen Todres, Will Pagano, Daniel Bernstein, Taiki Kasuga, Jack Schlossberg.

Front row (from l.): Peter Chapin, Peter Ginsberg, Avery, Brendan Harvey.