

# save the earth

real people, real solutions

Can one person really make a difference? Meet four women who prove that you can

When it comes to going green, never underestimate the power of a good idea. These women came up with ways to reduce, reuse and recycle, and they're spreading the word to their entire community—and beyond.

by Anne Cassidy

## party for a cause



Debbie Zinman and Alison Smith started ECHOage to make kids' birthday parties less wasteful, without sacrificing the fun.

**As mothers of young children,** Alison Smith and Debbie Zinman of Toronto know all about the toll birthday parties can take on the environment—from driving around in search of a gift when their kids are the guests (hello, gas emissions) to the endless wrapping paper cleanup when they're the hosts (goodbye, trees). One day in 2008, after a party their kids attended, these two friends looked at each other and said, "There has to be a better way."

"We've all been there," says Debbie, 40. "The gifts children get are often things they don't even want." So she and Alison, 41, asked kids (their own and

their friends') if they'd rather get one big gift they really wanted or a bunch of smaller ones. The kids chose the big gift. *But why stop there?* the moms wondered. Maybe there was also a way to turn birthday parties into an occasion to help others. And with that, their one-gift, one-cause birthday celebration idea was born. They named it ECHOage to represent kids shouting to the world that they're making a difference on their birthday.

The parties work like this: Parents register at [echoage.com](http://echoage.com) and the birthday boy or girl chooses one of several listed charities. After invitations are e-mailed, the *(Please turn to 29)*

## SAVE THE EARTH

CONTINUED partygoers (or their parents, since ECHOage parties are most popular among 3- to 8-year-olds) RSVP and make a monetary donation on the site. ECHOage sends half the amount (minus a 15 percent service fee) to the charity of choice and half to the birthday child. Parents and kids can keep track of RSVPs and donations online.

Ilana Rosenberg of Orange County, California, says her daughter, Natalie, 7, loved logging on before her party to see who was coming, and she didn't miss opening a pile of presents. "I knew Natalie wanted a Nintendo DS player, and while I wasn't thrilled about her getting one, I felt

**"Once moms realize there's a better way to do things, they're eager to share it."**

that using her share of the money raised with ECHOage made it a little more meaningful," says Ilana. And knowing that her daughter's party helped reduce waste made the day extra-special.

Debbie and Alison's eco-friendly parties have caught on with other moms, and the company now facilitates hundreds of parties a month in the U.S. and Canada. "Once moms realize there's a better way to do things, they're eager to share the news with their friends," says Alison.

## home green home

**Three years ago**, Tonya Ensign of Scottsdale, Arizona, had an epiphany. She was watching a television show about saving the earth when she heard that familiar question: "Paper or plastic?" Tonya blurted out, "Paper." The answer, of course, is neither: It's best to bring your own reusable bags to the grocery store.

"Here I was with my air conditioner blasting, my SUV in the garage and my disposable water bottle at my side, completely unaware of how wasteful my life was," says Tonya, 44. She vowed then to change her family's habits—and to help others do the same.

Tonya started small by buying reusable water bottles, switching to cloth shopping bags and adjusting her thermostat to save energy. She also began asking friends for more ideas and discovered that they were just as eager as she was for information on how to go green. So she and her friends made a pact: They'd talk to eco-experts, pool their knowledge and cheer each other's green efforts. "It was fun because it was so grassroots," she says.

The more Tonya learned, the more she wanted to share. So less than a year after her epiphany, Tonya and four friends (two of whom are still involved) created *emagineGreen* ([emaginegreen.com](http://emaginegreen.com)). Part informational workshop, part green Tupperware party, the company's in-home eco-parties led by trained "greenCoaches" are designed to duplicate Tonya's lightbulb moment of ecological awareness and then give people strategies and the chance to buy household products (everything from cleansers to candles) to change their lives. Tonya chose to focus on the direct sales approach because "what helps us succeed is women getting together and sharing information."

Beth Harris of Denver, North Carolina, who learned about *emagineGreen* from a friend in Arizona, has held four eco-parties in the last few months. "There's so much green information out there, it's hard to understand what it all means," she says. "But *emagineGreen* helps you know what steps to take."

The company's mission is to spread the word that moms can reduce their families' eco-footprints. "We moms are the CEOs of our homes, so we have tremendous power," says Tonya. "The best part about the parties is seeing women's faces when they realize how simple changes can make a big difference to our planet."

In two years, *emagineGreen* has gone from six coaches to 100 and has held eco-parties in more than 30 states. Before her epiphany, Tonya admits, "I had never even heard of Earth Day." Now she celebrates it every day. ▶



Tonya Ensign,  
cofounder of  
*emagineGreen*

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## stop, drop and recycle

**After reading an item** in the April 15, 2008, issue of *Woman's Day* on ways to recycle cell phones, cameras, bikes and more, Nancy Sarno de los Rios, 45, of Waverly, Pennsylvania, thought, *Wouldn't it be great if there were a place in my town where people could drop off items like that for donation?* So she decided to create it.

First she reached out to every charity mentioned in WD. “Then I Googled ‘where to donate’ and found different agencies in need of shoes, coats, prom dresses, you name it,” she says. “I contacted places all across the country.” Her plan? To collect the goods and mail them all over the U.S. But she kept hearing about charities right in her own backyard. “I learned of a really good place nearby called Shelf to Shelf, which redistributes donated books to needy children. Then I heard about a woman collecting coats for kids.” Through word of mouth, Nancy discovered a whole network of grassroots charities in her corner of Pennsylvania. “That’s when I realized that there was a need in my own community,” she says. Not only would keeping it local save on shipping costs, but

helping people close to home would also be much more satisfying. “It’s eye-opening to learn that someone right next door may not have a coat or warm blankets,” she says.

Nancy worked on the project, a one-day event dubbed the One Stop Donation Drop ([donationdrop.org](http://donationdrop.org)), in whatever spare time she could eke out after putting in a full day at her family’s tuxedo rental company. “To get the word out I printed flyers and had them distributed at schools, churches and the community center,” says Nancy. “I started a website, too, and our local newspaper became a corporate sponsor of the event.”

*The Abington Journal* printed Nancy’s wish list, which included bicycles, books, bedding, cell phones, eyeglasses, winter clothing, household goods, toys, sewing machines, sports equipment and prom dresses—items the charities wanted most. She tapped the local university and high school for student volunteers; neighbors and even her 7- and 5-year-old sons pitched in to help sort toys. “They always saw stuff they wanted to keep,” she laughs.

On April 18, 2009, the One

## 3 EASY WAYS TO GO GREEN

- Recycle clothes with a friend: “Shop” in each other’s closets, says Debbie.
- Close your fireplace damper, says Tonya. An open damper can amount to more than \$100 of energy loss over several months.
- Before hauling off old appliances, see if charities can use them, says Nancy.

Stop Donation Drop took over the lawn of the Waverly Community House. Large blue tarps covered every inch of ground, each one labeled by type of donation: books, toys, household items and so on. Some volunteers greeted donors at their cars to help them unload, while others spent the day sorting and loading donations into vans. In a four-hour period they collected 11 van loads of merchandise. "I couldn't believe how much stuff we got," Nancy says.

Although she shipped some of the items to national organizations



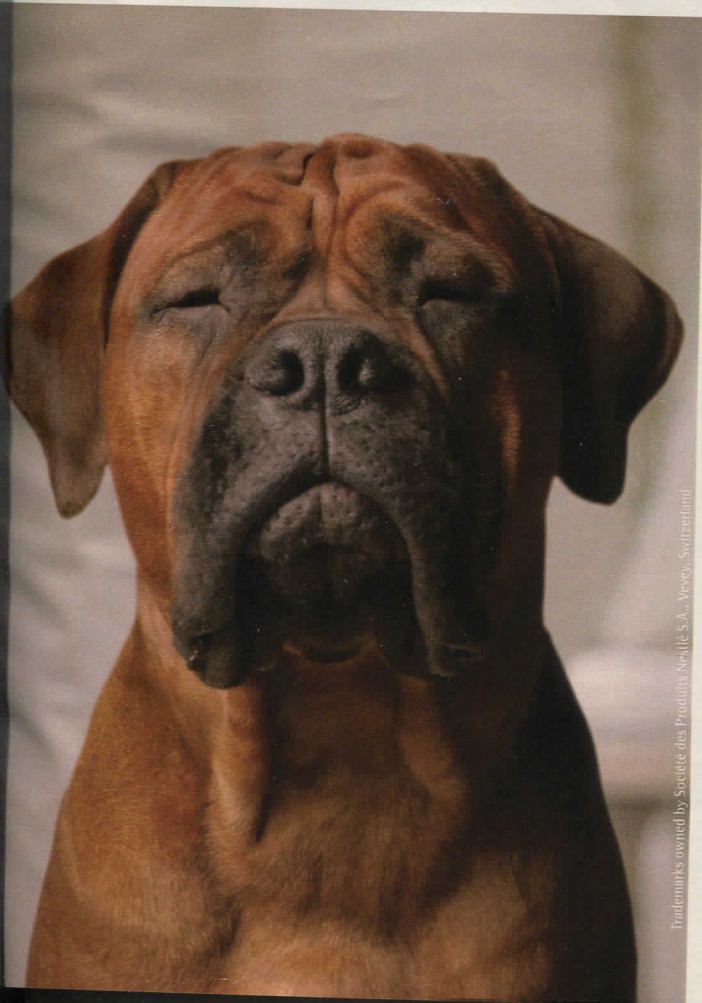
Nancy Sarno de los Rios, creator of the One Stop Donation Drop in Pennsylvania

like Cell Phones for Soldiers, most of the merchandise stayed local. One of the prime beneficiaries was Hope Benson, whose organization, Romy's Place, helps the working poor in Susquehanna County. When Benson arrived that Saturday morning, Nancy pointed to a blue tarp covered with toys and told her they were all hers. Benson's overjoyed response: "You just made Christmas for 75 families." In fact, one-third of the toys Benson gave

away last Christmas came from the One Stop Donation Drop.

"We got to help people who really needed it," Nancy says. And by giving others an easy way to recycle, she helped the environment too. The event was such a success that three more are planned in different Pennsylvania locations this April. If Nancy has her way, it's only the beginning: "My goal is to encourage people all over the country to start donation drops in their own communities." wd

"It's eye-opening to learn that someone right next door may not have a coat or blankets."



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