

## EXPLAINING

# The Fairchild Challenge: A Global Community

By Netiva Kolitz



Tens of thousands of students are heeding the call and becoming engaged citizens through their participation in Fairchild's unique and world-renowned educational program: **The Fairchild Challenge**.

**M**ore than 73,000—that's the number of students and teachers that the Fairchild Challenge engaged in both its local and Satellite Partner programs during the 2009-2010 school year. What exactly does this mean? It means that tens of thousands of students worldwide are actively learning about, exploring and devising imaginative and effective responses to some of the most pressing environmental issues of our time. More importantly, these students are heeding the call and becoming engaged citizens through their participation in Fairchild's unique and world-renowned educational program: **The Fairchild Challenge**.

The Fairchild Challenge is an annual, standards-based, environmental education outreach program that offers a menu of multidisciplinary competitions for grades pre-Kindergarten through 12. What began in 2002 as an environmentally-themed competition for local high schools, with some 1,400 high school participants in its first year, has now blossomed into a global movement in environmental education reaching students of various ages.

The Fairchild Challenge has clearly become a model beyond South Florida, influencing programs nationally and internationally. The success of the program in the Miami region has prompted Fairchild to offer it as a replicable model, both within the U.S. and abroad. The eagerness with which so many institutions have embraced this model reflects the program's relevance.

To date, Fairchild staff have trained educators from 53 institutions around the globe; of these, 12 have launched Fairchild Challenge Satellite programs. Fairchild Challenge Satellite Programs are active in central Florida, California, Utah and Pennsylvania (two sites). The Fairchild Challenge program is also reaching the far away lands of Venezuela, Colombia and Botswana. During the past program year alone, Satellite Partners have involved thousands of students in various Fairchild Challenge competitions including debate, eco-concert, poetry slam and garden chef cook-off.

In an effort to further expand our international reach, the Fairchild Challenge initiated a partnership with Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI) in 2008. Through this initiative, local Fairchild Challenge middle school participants were offered the opportunity to create cartoons and accompanying narratives that depict the complex relationships between plants and climate change throughout the world. Many of these students' creative and thought-provoking designs have been showcased on BGCI's Web site: [www.bgci.org/education/winners](http://www.bgci.org/education/winners).

Global Option to create a design that embodies Target 14 of the United Nation's Global Strategy for Plant Conservation (GSPC). Target 14 emphasizes "the importance of plant diversity and the need for its conservation." The winning design will be printed on posters that will be distributed to participants worldwide.

Schools may also participate this year in Global Showcases in art (original photographs and watercolor paintings that depict local area landscapes), school garden and habitat restoration, and environmental action projects. These many Global Options enable



Participants in Costa Rica's Fairchild Challenge program create a model car using recycled materials.




Participants in the Jardín Botánico de Mérida's Fairchild Challenge in Venezuela perform at their end-of-year awards ceremony and celebration.

In 2009, the Fairchild Challenge offered its first "Global Challenge Option" to Satellite Partner programs and Plant Conservation Day Partners around the world. This time, high school students were presented with the following challenge: create a design and accompanying narrative that convey a clear message on the theme of one's ecological footprint. The winning design would be printed on the cover of the CD single "Footprints," by London-based independent band, Storey.

students to share their work globally, while learning about plant conservation, and ecological and cultural diversity.

A local high school student, José García of Miami Lakes Educational Center, won first place in the Global Challenge Option. In addition to gaining international recognition for his talents, his eye-catching design and narrative, which focus on how to reduce one's ecological footprint, are helping educate others and raise awareness worldwide. You can view Jose's and other top entries at: [www.bgci.org/education/fairchild10](http://www.bgci.org/education/fairchild10). You can also download the single "Footprints" from iTunes; proceeds from the sale of this single go to support the Fairchild Challenge.

In January, Fairchild will host the 7th Annual Fairchild Challenge Satellite Partners Training Workshop for sites that want to learn more about the program and how to establish the Fairchild Challenge in their region. Representatives from institutions in Abu Dhabi, China, Haiti, Mexico, Peru, Puerto Rico, Turkey and Uganda have already expressed interest in attending. Fairchild scientists already have solid research ties with many of these sites, and expanded partnerships will provide unique opportunities for international collaborations between education and conservation science.

The Fairchild Challenge continues its global growth and positive impacts around the world, encouraging a global community of environmental leaders. 

The 2010-2011 Fairchild Challenge offers five global opportunities to high schools participating in Miami and Satellite Partner programs, as well as through BGCI. Schools may compete in the

 To learn more about the Fairchild Challenge and its Satellite Partner programs, please visit our Web site: [www.fairchildchallenge.org](http://www.fairchildchallenge.org).