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By, MJ Call

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Making It Easy to Be Green

Every fall, I dread the day my son comes home from school carrying that ubiquitous school fund raising tool....the Entertainment Book.

Every year, after getting a "pep" talk at school, he comes home determined to sell as many of the books as he can. Not to help out his school - oh no (he's 9...and not that magnanimous yet). But rather - he's got his eye on the prizes given to top sellers. Prizes he says he can't live without, but are so unmemorable that he can never remember what they are.

His enthusiasm for actually selling the books lasts about 40 minutes, but his enthusiasm for the prizes is never-ending. It always ends up that we buy the one book that's sent home with him, and he wins a cheesy toy that is broken or forgotten in 30 minutes (tops). Then, the book sits un-used until all its coupons have expired.

It's not that I'm too proud to use coupons. Far from it. It's just that the coupons are never for restaurants, activities, or businesses I frequent. As I wrote in my "Kitchen Think" bio....I prefer local over chain. And that's because I like to support my neighbors, my neighborhood and my city.

That's why it's my pleasure to tell you that this vicious cycle has finally been broken at my kid's public school (and potentially your kid's school, and any other interested non-profit), thanks to a brave, entrepreneurial woman who not only wanted to find a better way to fund raise...but make San Francisco greener in the process.

Anne Vollen, along with long-time friend and business partner Sheryl Cohen, are the brains behind Green Zebra, "a new guide to natural living in San Francisco, offering more than 250 exclusive incentives (i.e. coupons and offers). Anne, who has two kids older than mine, apparently felt the exact same way about the Entertainment Book as I did...but has the cojones to actually do something about it.

However, the driving force behind Green Zebra is Anne and Sheryl's commitment to "move sustainable living into the mainstream" here in San Francisco...which has been surprisingly slow to "go green" compared to some other cities. (Eugene, OR, Austin, TX and Portland, OR are the top three green cities, according to this year's Green Guide report).

The inaugural 2007 Green Zebra Guide contains thousands of dollars worth of savings at local green companies such as organic restaurants and markets, eco-friendly retailers, yoga studios, wellness centers, spas, bike shops, indy bookstores and more. Anne says that she is "particularly pleased that many chefs and restaurant owners who don't generally offer discounts have chosen to participate in Green Zebra because they believe in our mission"

And that's not all....

It also features 20 articles with practical tips on adopting a healthier and more sustainable lifestyle...many of which were written with input from the SF Department of the Environment. "We are fortunate in California to have an abundance of options that are good for us and the planet," Anne tells me. And although the Green Zebra Guide does not contain a comprehensive list of SF's green businesses, the hope is that by providing incentives like coupons from some of these eco-friendly local companies, "people will be encouraged to try them and other similar businesses, and start putting some thought into whether their shopping habits reflect their personal values."

Anne's goal for Green Zebra is two-fold. She wants it not only to move green-thinking into the mainstream, but also serve as a more successful locally-grown fund raiser for schools and non-profits. Long-term, she hopes to expand Green Zebra to create a Marin-centric guide and possibly an East Bay-centric guide.

But wait, there's more!

Green Zebra is donating a portion of each book sale to a local charity, in an effort to nurture the next generation of environmentally responsible citizens. This year's beneficiary will be the Conservation Connection Project...which has provided a hands-on environmental science program to some of the city's most under-served grade schools.

Starting October 1st, The Green Zebra Guide will be available for purchase online at thegreenzebra.org, and at participating retailers also listed on the website. San Francisco schools or non-profits interested in using Green Zebra as a fund raiser can call 415.346.2361 or email anne@thegreenzebra.org .

Oh, and in her spare time, Anne serves on the PTA, is coaching her son's soccer team for a 6th season, and her daughter's soccer team for a 5th season. If and when I ever catch up with her...I plan to thank her for making San Francisco not only greener, but a less frustrating place for families to live.

It's not that easy bein' green...
But green's the color of Spring
And green can be cool and friendly-like
And green can be big like an ocean, or important
like a mountain or tall like a tree

When green is all there is to be
It could make you wonder why,
but why wonder why
Wonder, I am green and it'll do fine
it's beautiful
And I think it's what I wanna be.