

# GREEN MACHINE

As the 13th-annual **X-MAS Party** lights up the scene, **Ted Turner** and his daughter, **Laura Turner Seydel**, get help from Captain Planet in their efforts to raise eco-consciousness

BY JONATHAN LERNER    PORTRAITS BY MALI AZIMA

If anybody in Atlanta knows how to throw a wild party it would be **KP Hendry**. She first made fireworks as creative director of Limelight, the legendary '80s nightclub located next door to a Buckhead supermarket that is still referred to by people of a certain age as the Disco Kroger. Since 1995 Hendry has produced the annual X-MAS Party for the Captain Planet Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to environmental education for kids, which was started with proceeds from Ted Turner's eco-warrior cartoon show *Captain Planet*. In Atlanta, there is hardly a benefit-free evening in the year, but the hot-ticket X-MAS Party revolves in an orbit of its own. "They always have great entertainment and a great mix of people that you would not normally see," says **Richie Arpino**, who attends annually. To illustrate these two points, Arpino, a society hairstylist and budding photographer with a specialty in male nudes, recalls the disco-themed X-MAS Party two years ago. "Disco's easy for me—I can just run into my closet and grab something," he says, as he still owns plenty of vintage clubwear he purchased new. "Martha Wash came out and sang 'It's Raining Men.' I remember going up in my '70s drag and wig to our governor, Mr. [Sonny] Perdue, and introducing myself."

With the theme "Visionary Voyages," this year's party, at Tabernacle on December 14th, looks forward rather than back, and out to the world. Performers will be global, including the rumba-flamenco trio Duende Camaron and, in its first Atlanta appearance, the throbbing transnational tribal-rock ensemble Kan'Nal. This year's event will also benefit Jules Verne Adventures, a nonprofit

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that point of no return."

She was already too old for cartoons when *Captain Planet* hit the airwaves in 1990, but as thousands of children in its audience could do indirectly, she credits her father for her own environmental awareness. "Kids learn, develop ethics and morals from their parents," she says. She recalls weeding their yard with her siblings by hand instead of using chemicals and picking up bottles and cans on walks along Northside Drive. "You left a room and didn't turn the lights off, you

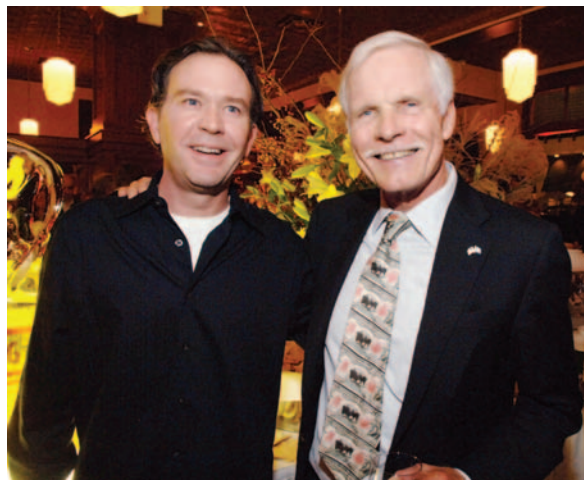
dedicated to exploration, education and preservation of biodiversity. The party here takes place in tandem with the Jules Verne Adventure Film Festival in Los Angeles, where Ted Turner is to receive the Spirit of Nature Award, and there will be a reunion of actors who voiced *Captain Planet's* characters, including **Ed Begley, Jr.**, **Malcolm McDowell** and **LeVar Burton**. In Atlanta, **David Coburn**, who voiced Captain Planet himself, will be the master of ceremonies. All this promises plenty of fun from our town to Tinseltown, but underlying the festivities is a keen sense of urgency about the world's environmental predicament. "If we don't do something, we're affecting our own children and children all over the world, and future generations," says **Laura Turner Seydel**, the foundation's president. "We're this close, I am convinced, to reaching



**Captain America.** Ted Turner, photographed in his Atlanta office. Behind him is the America's Cup he won in 1977.



## X-MAS PARTY



**The Planeteers.** Some celebrity support for Captain Planet include, clockwise from top left. Tom Brokaw and David Letterman; Timothy Hutton and Ted Turner at Ted's Montana Grill in New York; Ginair and George McKerrow, Jr. at Ralph Lauren to celebrate the upcoming X-MAS Party 2007; Cindy Wilson, Fred Schneider, Jane Fonda, Ted Turner, Keith Strickland, Kate Pierson and Laura Turner Seydel at 2001: A Space Odyssey X-MAS Party.



**Solutions demand big shifts in consciousness, “We’ve had paradigm shifts before,” says Turner.**

were in trouble. Dad was avid about it, leading by example doing all of these things. He was a successful businessman; it wasn't a money issue, it was what was right. And instead of going and buying a big American-made gas guzzler, which is still a status symbol today, he bought a used Toyota Corolla." (Now one of the world's richest men, Turner is driven—in a Prius hybrid).

For the entrepreneur who envisioned and built CNN, the idea of using his media resources in the service of his environmental politics was a no-brainer. "We needed to get young people aware of the environmental problems and solutions," Turner says. "Every single episode [of *Captain Planet*] has solutions in it, and it tells the kids, 'The power is yours, and that by your powers combined, you can achieve your goals, if you work together and work hard.'" The show originally aired from 1990 to 1996. It is still seen occasionally at off-hours, but according to Turner no other children's show with a similar theme has been produced. "They've got all these violent cartoons on," he says, "and these programs have a lot of influence on kids. If they see a bunch of dumb programs we're going to have a bunch of dumb kids." Living up to his outspoken reputation, he then extends this analysis of causes and effects to: dumb adolescents; a dumb population; our current president and administration; and "Why we're in Iraq, because of dumb, stupid decisions." Conversation with Turner can be a wild ride.

But he's utterly serious about his convictions and puts his considerable money where his mouth is—making a \$1-billion donation to the United Nations Foundation, for example, and along with former U.S. Senator Sam Nunn founding the Nuclear Threat Initiative, which works to reduce the world's stockpiles of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. His own family foundation "didn't shy away from funding organizations that were doing a lot of advocacy," Turner Seydel points out, "in a time when a lot of foundations...only funded programs that were not controversial."

Dad had been captain of the debate team; for his daughter, a public-speaking role comes less naturally. "I prefer not to be in photographs, or on television. I

was beyond scared to put myself out and take the risk," Turner Seydel says. "Until about a year ago, I tried to get anybody I knew to do it for me." Then she assumed the presidency of the Captain Planet Foundation. Perhaps she is still nervous, but passion for the cause masks that. "My children are my motivation," she says, but adds that if she didn't feel compelled to do this work, "I would be a better mom and a more hands-on parent. This takes me away from them a lot." Still, it allows her to affect the lives of many children. Of all the types of projects the foundation supports, she is especially gratified by being able to fund "edible school yards"—vegetable gardens at schools. "Most of the people who apply for this are in inner-city schools," she explains. "These would be the only green and fresh vegetables that they would see." The produce can be eaten and also sold in these neighborhoods, which typically lack decent shopping and "make a little bit of money to put back in their program. This is a gift that keeps on giving. They come to us for \$500. Then they have the tools to do it every year." The foundation supports other green projects such as restoring wetlands, planting trees and starting recycling centers, but only efforts involving kids.

Regarding the world's environmental and political challenges, Turner describes himself as "cautiously optimistic." He concedes that real solutions will demand huge shifts in consciousness on the part of masses of people. "But we've had paradigm shifts before," he says. "One-hundred years ago virtually no women in the world had equal rights with men, and now close to half the women in the world have equal rights with men. But there's still half that don't, and that's outrageous." Turner was traveling in the Amazon with the undersea explorer **Jacques Cousteau** about 20 years ago at a time when he felt himself growing pessimistic about our ability to save the planet. "He said, 'Ted, even if we knew for sure that we weren't going to make it, what could people of good conscience do but try their best to the very end? That's what I'm doing, and you've got to do that, too.' Whenever I get a little depressed I think of that. We've got to fight to the last man." ○



**Like father, like daughter.** Laura Turner Seydel, overcoming her shyness, has become a fierce campaigner for solutions to our environmental crises.

