

# Author, publisher wants kids to love Earth first

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It's the time of year when gardeners start noticing holes and piles of castings that indicate some very busy invertebrates have been at work.

It is here that children's writer and publisher Tim Magner found inspiration for the unlikely protagonist in the recently released picture book, *Earl the Earthworm Digs for His Life*.

Earl can't buzz about like a bee. He isn't as strong as an ant. He isn't as beautiful as the prairie grasses or as spectacular as a giant tree. But Earl discovers his role is vital to the ecosystem.

*Earl the Earthworm* is one three titles released by Magner this spring. It is joined by *N is for Nature: An Environmental Alphabet Book*, an alphabet book targeted at emergent readers, and *An Environmental Guide from A to Z*, which is an illustrated guide to different environmental concepts targeted at readers aged 8 to 13.

All three have been released by Green Sugar Press, the publishing company also created by Magner, who grew up in Wilmette and Winnetka, who now lives on the North Side of Chicago.

Magner (who was snacking on granola just before starting this interview) is a self-described family frog catching champion, which meant bragging rights as the middle of five brothers and sisters. His childhood, he said, was full of outdoors stuff: fishing, diving into golf course lagoons in search of balls, husking sweet corn purchased at roadside stands.

"I always knew I'd do something with kids and education. I'd done a number of things, from being a camp counselor to teaching skiing to being

on school boards, and I then I started writing books," he explained.

As Magner delved into writing, he queried fellow writers and publishers about the process of writing, how picture book manuscripts become illustrated, how manuscripts become books, and how books get into the hands of readers.

It started as an effort to learn how everything in children's publishing worked. But it led to a new idea.

"It made sense that if I going to do it, I could make it a lot bigger than just me," he said, "and the way to do that was to start my own publishing company."

Magner decided to keep most everything local.

"I wanted my illustrators to be here, so I could meet with them and go over things with them. I wanted my printer to be here so I could see what was going on and could see how it all works."

He reached out to the Art Institute of Chicago where he hooked up with illustrators Lindsay Knapp (Earl the Earthworm), Aubri A. Vincent-Barwood (Environmental Guide), and Mike Nudelman (Environmental Alphabet Book). He tapped a friend in La Grange who owned a printing company. He recruited his sister, Cammy Hines of Northfield, to help with logistics.

"Over the past two years, while he was developing the stories, he would bounce ideas off of me," Hines said. "He'd ask me or kids to read stuff, and then he asked me if I'd be willing to help him sell the books in the Chicago area. I have four children of my own, so I'm out at bookstores and kids stores. I know what's out there."

Hines added that she didn't have experience in sales or publishing, but, she said, she's got something else, "I'm a mom. I'm a mom of four kids who loves nature, who loves being outside, and who loves Uncle Tim, so that's how I got involved."

The Green Sugar Press books are ideal, she said, for a family like hers. "We moved to Northfield four years ago and immediately dug a big vegetable garden. We garden, we compost, we recycle, and our kids think a lot about saving the environment."

While the first three books were written by Magner, future books will likely

come from other writers, he said. "We're just getting ramped up."

But the mission of Green Sugar Press is already clear. It's about showing growing minds some of the wonderful things that exist outside.

"I love going into schools and talking to kids. But a lot of times I'll get introduced as the guy who'll be talking about recycling and fossil fuels. I'll look out and it's a class of second graders. I'd rather talk about..." he paused. "I'd rather we give kids the chance to love the Earth before we ask them to save it."

For more, visit [www.greensugarpress.com](http://www.greensugarpress.com).

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