

# It's a bird ... it's a plane ... it's 'Michael Recycle'

by Master Sgt. Scott Wagers

SAN ANTONIO — Most superheroes wear some type of costume to hide their true identities when they do their good deeds in public, but not **Michael Redfern**. Everyone knows his alter ego is “Michael Recycle,” waste’s worst enemy.

In his day-to-day job, Mr. Redfern is a mild-mannered Air Education and Training Command environmental engineer who oversees the recycling program for 13 Air Force bases. But when he’s in front of a group of youngsters, an amazing transformation takes place.

Cloaked in a green, Superman-like outfit and with the appliquéd letters “MR” and the recycling logo displayed on his chest, the caped crusader goes into action.

He thrills school children when he makes appearances as Michael Recycle. The hero fills rooms with cheers and laughter when he makes his entrance with his introduction: “Able to leap tall trash bins; faster than a speeding aluminum can; more durable than 20-year old Styrofoam in a landfill; it’s not a bird nor a plane, but the Air Force’s super-mega recycling hero — Michael Recycle.”

With a swish of his cape, the mighty Michael walks around the classroom talking to students about the good of recycling and composting. He concludes by handing out memorabilia made of recycled materials.

“I’ve visited with thousands of students,” he said. “My most memorable moment was when a third-grader asked me what it’s like to be a superhero. Somewhat taken aback by that question, I thought, ‘Me a superhero?’ I took my Superman stance with hands on hips and said, ‘It’s a super life! What’s it like to be a third-grader?’ Her little shoulders went up in a shrug.”

The creation of the physical character was fashioned from a production of comic strips and coloring books he developed as a catchy way to commemorate the first America Recycles Day in 1997. Michael Recycle first debuted as a character in “The Adventures of Michael Recycle” comic strip series that he designs and authors, which is now in its 24th edition. The strip has become so popular that he was recently offered the opportunity to feature his comic character in *Weekly Reader* — a children’s magazine distrib-



**After creating a comic strip character to promote recycling, Michael Redfern** decided to bring his imaginative character to life to further his cause. The superhero thrills school children like these at Lackland Elementary School during his dozen or more appearances across the country each year to promote Earth Day, America Recycles Day and other environmental events.

uted to more than 8 million kids from pre-kindergarten through high school.

The Office of the Federal Environmental Executive recently awarded him the 2003 White House Closing the Circle Award for his education and outreach

efforts. The Recycling Coalition of Texas also honored him with the Rick Fuszek Memorial Front-Line Award.

— Olga Purpura-Clark  
Air Education and Training Command  
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