A Peepal Baba who has planted 600,000 trees, a 'Compost Wali' who works with waste, a tiger biologist whose life's mission is to catch poachers: Timberland's Unsung Heroes for 2010 are a colourful group

By Ankit Gupta // Photographs by Parikhit Pal

Timberland, the iconic American maker of outdoor shoes and apparel, launched in India last month with their first store at Ambience Mall in Delhi's Vasant Kunj. The 60-year-old company became famous in the 1960s for its rugged waterproof boots which it made using a then revolutionary technology that allowed the molding of the sole with the upper of the shoe without using the traditional stitching method. Since then, Timberland's range has expanded to include shoes, jackets, clothes and accessories for men, women and children. But the company has stayed close to its outdoor roots, more so in recent times, through its Earthkeeper movement which works towards conserving the environment in a variety of ways. As part of a volunteer programme, all Timberland employees give 40 hours a year to make a ‘difference in their communities’. So it was in keeping with the company's philosophy that the India store inauguration had a slightly different twist. Reliance Brands, Timberland's local partner, used the occasion to launch a programme called Unsung Heroes to honour men and women across the country who have spent their lifetime conserving nature. The selection, which was made with help from conservationist and documentary film-maker Mike Pandey, included a bus conductor who plants trees, a 'compost wall' who works with waste and a 'Peepal Baba' known for planting 6,00,000 peepal trees. "The Unsung Heroes project clearly reflects the partnership between two socially committed business giants, Timberland and Reliance. To us Unsung Heroes is not an event, it is a movement," says Darshan Mehta, President & CEO, Reliance Brands Ltd. Besides Pandey, Reliance's other partner in the project is actor John Abraham. Impressed by Peepal Baba's work of going around north India on his motorcycle to plant trees, he bought him a new motorcycle. "They are the real heroes," says Abraham.
EPAL BABA

Poonam Bir Kasturi is known as 'Compost Wali,' a title she is proud of. Ask her how a graduate of product design from NID turned into an environmentalist and she laughs and says, 'It's the road less taken.' It was at Shri Shri School of Art, Design and Technology in Bangalore, where she is a founding faculty, that the thought of finding a way to create sustainable products and working with compost took root. In 2008, Kasturi founded Daily Dump, which helps households turn their daily waste into compost. She worked with rural craftsmen to create her now-famous terracotta home composters. Her firm also provides information and expertise to anyone interested in starting a composting project. As she says on her website, 'Daily Dump is about creating a new perception of waste and enabling dignified action.'

COMPOST WALI