

## **Kids' videos offer new view of uranium mining's legacy**

By Dana Martinez December 8, 2018

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GRANTS — Community members sat down for an afternoon of education on the area's history of uranium mining at the Grants Public Library Friday.

While that is not an uncommon occurrence for Cibola County, the day's teachers were unique, elementary school students from St. Joseph Mission School shared their documentary style videos on the subject.

At least 10 St. Joseph's students participated in the Multicultural Alliance for a Safe Environment's Video Contest. They worked alone and in groups and researched their subject matter intensely. Their video projects were part of a service learning initiative.

### **Students show interest**

Principal Antonio Trujillo said they showed more interest in the subject than they did in their usual reading and math work. Trujillo said the students applied all their skills into research and learning about the issue. He said, "I was really surprised. They really got involved with the idea that they are part of something bigger than themselves and that our area is ground zero for a worldwide dialog."

The sixth-grade students researched on their own and added a personally relevant angle by interviewing family members who participated in uranium mining in the past, of which almost all the students interviewed their grandparents and other senior family members.

### **Hits close to home**

The video project hit close to home for the students, both literally and figuratively. In fourth place was a video from Raiden Martinez and Jimmy Nunez. The two actually live near Jackpile Mine in Laguna Pueblo.

In second place was Elijah Dah and Stevie Nunez, who interviewed their principal. Trujillo gave a brief overview of his own post-1971 experience with the uranium mining industry.

The only quartet group came in third place. Fabian Chereposy, Damien Baca, Carmella Chosa, Johnathan Victorino and Joaquin Candelaria each researched a specific branch of information on uranium and mining techniques.

### **'Fun, but frustrating'**

In first place was Merrick Kohn. He interviewed his grandmother who talked about her experience working in an office above a uranium mine.

In the video, she explained the path of how employees other than actual miners discovered that there were still ill effects on employees health regardless of entering the actual mine.

Kohn said that the project was fun but very frustrating. Because of technical difficulties he had to edit his project three times.

Each winning contestant received a share of prize money. The third-place group said that they planned to put their sum toward a school trip happening later this year to Notre Dame University in South Bend, Indiana

### **Filmmaker lends advice**

Also present was a filmmaker and activist from India, Shriprakash. The audience screened his film, "NABIKEI." The film delves into the history of uranium mining in the Southwest and focuses on the past and present effects for Native American communities. It also details India's hardships with the same industry.

The crowd started a brief discussion after Shriprakash's film and talked about their hopes for their new budding filmmakers. Shriprakash started the discussion by comparing the United States efforts to have standards for health, safety and the environment.

### **A new hope**

Carletta Garcia said a few words to the group. One of the school students is relative. She said, "I have a new hope future environmentalists."

That hope is also shared with Trujillo, who said that they want to keep the kids geared toward more similar projects. In the future, Trujillo hopes to have the kids participate in a project wherein they learn about scientific testing of water around mines.

Organizer of the contest, Candace Head-Dylla, is the Community Liaison for the Bluewater Valley Downstream Alliance. She said that this is the first video contest that the group has put on. The afternoon was dedicated to the elementary students.

"We're trying to get the youth interested in the topic and issues. We hope that they can understand the issues and legacy left," she said.

She added that this was also good for them to hear from a professional like Shriprakash. He noted that he "sees a lot of hope" in the students' eyes over their project.

The evening portion was hosted at New Mexico State University-Grants for the high school student entries. It was in combination with an International Film Festival.