



CHIEFTAIN PHOTO/JOHN JAQUES

Columbian Elementary fifth-grade students Nadine Juarez, (left), and David Benavidez, both 11, hold their 'painted ponies' that they made for the school's fund-raising project to benefit the Pueblo YMCA.

Painted ponies for pennies

Columbian Elementary fifth-grade benefits YMCA by utilizing Painted Ponies Project

By GAYLE PEREZ
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

Columbian Elementary School fifth-grader Guadalupe Fernandez knows he likely won't solve the problems of the world by himself.

His classmate Nadine Juarez doesn't expect she can do much to improve the economy of this country or make cities crime free.

Guadalupe and Nadine were among 12 students who participated in Columbian teacher Michelle Hills' "Painted Ponies Project," in hopes of making a difference for the youth in Pueblo.

"We're hoping to raise about \$1,000 for the YMCA," said David Benavidez.

"No, I think we can raise about \$5,000," Nadine added. "I think after people see what we've been doing, they'll want to help us build the new YMCA."

The Painted Ponies Project, which culminated with the painting of ceramic ponies, is designed to get people motivated to donate money toward the proposed new YMCA complex.

For the past three months, the select group of fifth-grade students have read, done research and wrote about New Mexico's popular "Trail of the Painted Ponies" project.

In 2000, a major sculptor was commissioned to create a life-size horse. Artists throughout the Southwest were then invited to submit designs for the horses and the finished products were auctioned off with the proceeds going to various nonprofit organizations.

Hill, who teaches English as a Second Language and writing at Columbian, proposed the idea to her students and they were excited about the possibility of helping the community through the extended learning project.

"I wanted to do a project that incorporated writing, developing an appreciation for the arts and helping out a local nonprofit," Hill said.

The students began working on the project in December, researching the Trail of the Painted Ponies project and history of New Mexico.

At the end of the research project, each of the dozen students received a ceramic pony, compliments of Easton ceramics, that they painted in whatever design they wished. The students then named their ponies and wrote a description how they decorated the horse.

The ponies now will go on display today through April 26 at various locations.

As part of the display, the school will encourage people to donate to the YMCA on behalf of Columbian's Painted Ponies Project.

The school also has scheduled its own "Pennies for Ponies" drive, with all proceeds going to the Y project.

While the students learned a lot about the project and New Mexico history, it also gave them an opportunity to expand their artistic talents as well.

Stacy Looker, who named her pony "Night Sky," also painted a night and ocean scene.

"I like the sky and I wanted something with the sky on my pony," she said. "I like the ocean, so I decided to put that on there, too."

Guadalupe named his pony "Patches" and put different designs on it that were inspired by the stories his mother told him about her horse, "Apache."

Nadine also decorated her horse "Party Girl" in honor of her mother.

"She doesn't like to party, but she's always real cheerful and that's what I wanted my horse to be - cheerful," she said of the pony covered with bright flowers and streamers.

David painted his pony "Tunes" a bright pink with musical instruments on it. "I like music, so I decided to paint my pony to involve music," he said.

Other students who participated in the project and the names of their ponies were: Ian Ferris, "Rocky Mountain"; Diana Rocha, "Power Flower"; Cierra Benavidez, "Fiesta"; Senceri Arellano, "Shapes"; Nikkolas Woody, "Heavenly Illusion"; Leny Samora, "Peace in the Night"; Joshua Straube, "Storm"; Reina Duran, "Lollipop"; Ashley Stoneking, "Midnight," and Mrs. Hill "Thunderbolt."

The ponies will be on display through Friday near the Waldenbook store at the Pueblo Mall. The ponies will then be on display at the Robert Hoag Rawlings Public Library from March 29 through April 11 and at the Pueblo County Courthouse April 12-26.

Anyone interested in donating to the YMCA on behalf the Columbian Painted Ponies project can do so through the YMCA.