

## **The Santa Fe New Mexican – Wednesday, 6-4-08**

### **Local News**

#### **From Old to Gold**

For dozens of kids, toy exchange helps turn trash to treasure

By Jessica Del Curto  
*For the New Mexican*

About 40 children filled the auditorium of the National Dance Institute-New Mexico, where heaping piles of toys spilled out of plastic bins Tuesday evening.

In the middle of the room sat two “bankers,” doling out points to children in exchange for their used or unwanted toys.

The bankers were 12-year old Stewart Ottersberg and his 11-year-old sister, Gabriella, both NDI-NM students. They took their jobs seriously, knowing the children would be cashing in their points by the end of the night to buy toys that others had donated.

This idea of a toy exchange, or kaekko, sprung from Japanese artist Hiroshi Fuji, who traveled to Santa Fe for “Lucky Number Seven,” SITE Santa Fe’s Seventh International Biennial, which began this month.

Fuji, who sets up kaekkos wherever he travels, has been spreading the word that one child’s toy is another’s treasure. Fuji planned to use some toys not taken home Tuesday in a sculpture to be displayed at the Museum of International Folk Art during the biennial.

“Some people don’t want their toys because they are very dirty or very old,” he said. “But if they bring those toys to another country, people like them. So the used toys travel the world.

At Fuji’s house in Tokyo, he said, nothing is ever thrown away. And many of the toys in the NDI-NM auditorium had belonged to his own children.

Xander Mojarrab, 11, fell in love with a miniature bank made of black metal with Japanese artwork scrolled along the side. “I don’t really like the plastic motorcycles,” he said of the stereotypical “boy toys” that had been donated. “But I like black metal, and I’m really into Japanese stuff so this caught my eye.”

Xander donated several stuffed animals and received seven points from the bankers. The Japanese bank set him back just two points.

Not all the children who showed up with boxes of toys to donate were interested in taking home something new. Jenifer Deaguero said her two children were more excited about cleaning out their closets so they could come back later to see if any of their unwanted toys had become part of Fuji’s art pieces.

“It’s a great way to teach the value of reusing objects,” said Tim Santos, artistic director of NDI-NM. “Fuji has also set up system of commerce directed by children. They rate and value things they find important.”

Students who donated toys can help Fuji create the toy sculptures from 3 to 5 p.m. Friday and Saturday at Fine Arts for Children and Teens, 1516 Pacheco St. To participate call 992-2782