

New Mexican –Monday April 4, 2005

Week of the Young Child kicks off in S.F.

Julian Mendez smiled, his two front teeth missing, the whiskers of a cat painted on his face. He wore a hat made of newspaper, decorated with feathers, fuzzy balls and splashed with glittery glue.

But as outrageous as his outfit was, Mendez, a kindergarten student at Agua Fria Elementary School, fit right in with all the other children who spent Sunday afternoon doing arts and crafts and watching performances at the National Dance Institute Dance Barns.

“Young children learn by doing, and we wanted to demonstrate that here today,” said Francine Foster, a member of the Northeast New Mexico Association for the Education of Young Children, which sponsored the event.

The event kicked off Week of the Young Child, a national event that recognizes the needs of young children and programs that serve those needs. To set the week off officially, Santa Fe City Councilor Karen Heldmeyer read a mayoral proclamation that designated April 3-9 as Week of the Child in Santa Fe.

In addition to the arts and crafts booths, children were also treated to juggling, magic, mariachi music by a student group from Chaparral Elementary and dance performances by NDI students.

“The sponsors of the event need to be commended,” said Fred Nathan, director of Think New Mexico, who attended with his 3-year-old daughter Arielle. “As parents of young children, we could use events like this every weekend,” Nathan said.

The variety of booths and performances also provided students with a chance to pick activities suited to their personalities, although some were less choosy than others.

“I liked that we got to dance with partners,” said 7-year-old Gwen Apfelbaum. The second-grader at Chaparral got to dance with the NDI performers.

Eight-year-old Monte Ortega, a second-grader at El Dorado- and an old pre-school friend of Apfelbaum’s- couldn’t name her favorite part. “I liked everything,” Ortega said.

Among the groups that set up booths and projects for children were the Santa Fe Children’s Museum, Temple Beth Shalom Preschool and La Casita Preschool, which was responsible for the newspaper hats.

Last year organizers set up an exhibit at City Hall, but they decided to make this year’s Week of the Young Child a more interactive affair, Foster said.

“I think it’s absolutely essential for parents and children to see the different things they can do at home instead of watching TV,” Joan Jamison said. Jamison is director of the pre-kinder-garten program at Agua Fria Elementary and a member of the Northeast New Mexico Association for the Education of Young Children.

“It expands parents’ awareness of what you can do and how much fun it is,” Jamison said.