

SMILE!

Photos from top to bottom: Lily and Kaleb Cedillo, by Franky Cedillo. Eloisa Ramirez preparing nopales by Jessica Perez. Franky Cedillo, Shawn Poynter and Miranda Owens by Robyn Kale. Jessica Pérez by Robyn Kale.

Fotos de arriba a abajo: Lily y Kaleb Cedillo, por Franky Cedillo. Eloisa Ramirez preparando nopales por Jessica Pérez. Franky Cedillo, Shawn Poynter y Miranda Owens por Robyn Kale. Jessica Pérez por Robyn Kale.



Photography program helps students see world through different lens

By ROBYN KALE

The slide show gave a taste of everyday life captured by the children's cameras. One shot showed two girls dancing, one wore a cowboy hat and both flashed big smiles. The next picture showed two boys at a Catholic church lined up in front of a statue of the Virgin Mary. When their work would appear on the screen some kids giggled, others turned away in embarrassment.

As each new picture would appear on the screen, Jane Crowe, Telamon Corp. program development coordinator, asked, "What do you like about this one, what attracts your eye, and what could have been done differently?"

The children were chosen by a committee of community members to take part in a youth photography project funded by the Starbucks Foundation and called Growing Tennessee: Rural Youth Cultivate Common Ground. Participants, ages 11 to 18, met at Telamon's Bulls Gap and Unicoi offices with adult mentors who helped them create photo essays and digital stories about their families and the farmland.

Telamon, a non-profit company which provides migrant and seasonal Head Start services for young children in Tennessee, received the grant to run the program last August and the first class was held in September.

Its inspiration was a documentary that Crowe saw about children in India receiving cameras and having their work displayed in a museum.

Ten children in Greene County and eight in Unicoi County participated, and more are expected to join in this year. Some are children of migrant farm workers, others are local members of 4-H. 4-H is a youth organization that teaches leadership, citizenship and life skills.

When the photography program started, the parents were enthusiastic, yet the kids were a little shy around each other, Crowe said.

At one meeting, held last fall, the kids learned how to set up pictures so their subjects won't have red-eye. An instructor showed them how to set a timer on the camera.

"I took this class for fun and to learn more about photography," said Miranda Owens, 11, a student at Greenville Adventist Academy.

"I think this program is wonderful," said Debbie Owens, Miranda's mother. "I like the fact that the cultures are combined. We need more of that today. Miranda is actually teaching me about photography. I had no idea how to load the film, and now she is showing me how to take out the red-eye problem."

Another program participant, Jessica Pérez, 11, who attends Rutledge Middle School, said that she really enjoys this class and hopes to continue with it.

While everyone was munching on pizza and cookies, freelance photographer Shawn Poynter showed pictures from his trips. A photographer for several newspapers, he talked about which lenses to use for certain shots and reminded the kids to always have a camera handy. "You never know when you are going to need it," he said.

At the end of the meeting, the kids showed their favorite pictures to the group, explaining why they chose them.

Miranda took a picture of her cat.

"I was setting up the picture and he just kept coming closer and closer so I just took the picture," she said. Poynter said he liked that picture because it looked like an Impressionistic painting.

As the meeting ended, students were given their next assignments. They were told to take pictures of places they go with their families.

One girl spoke up and asked, "Wal-Mart?" The response was, "Yes, Wal-Mart is fine."

Through the photo project children learn about art and technology, understand more about the environment and do work that makes them feel proud. The program also helps them to think critically, to explore new cultures, and to see how learning can be fun.