

LOCAL NEWS

Program asks students to make 'snap' judgments of surroundings

By Leezel Tanglao

DAILY BREEZE

Lydia Horta didn't need an expensive high-tech camera to bring her community to life — just a cheap disposable, awareness of the world around her and a dash of outrage.

"I don't like graffiti on walls," wrote the 10-year-old in a story accompanying a photo of a tagged-up wall she took as part of the "Shoot with Cameras — Not with Guns" after-school program at Wilmington Park Elementary School. The fifth-grader is one of 11 students who participated in the program, now in its sixth year.

The students recently showcased their work in a photo exhibit in the school's cafeteria. Pictures of smiling family members and pets sharply contrasted with other photos of a trashed school restroom and Lydia's graffiti-splattered wall.

"When I walked by it I felt really bad. I had to share it with the rest of the class," she said.

Along with the photo, in her accompanying story she wrote, "This is bad because my



Jesenia Cuara, center, Lydia Horta, left, Peter Campos and Iselda Geraldo are participants in the "Shoot with Cameras — Not with Guns" program, an after-school photography class at Wilmington Park Elementary School.

SEAN HILLER/
DAILY BREEZE

community, Wilmington, will look more ugly with just one word on the wall."

Created in 1998 by Alina Bueno, the photography endeavor is designed to provide an arts-based program to allow children to express how they feel about their com-

munity.

The program is part of Bueno Kids — an organization founded by Bueno, and cycles every seven weeks with a new group of students in several schools. It is funded by the Gang Alternatives Program at the school.

The students were given one 27-exposure disposable camera and a quick introduction to photography.

Bueno also required students to write a story with their photographs. Afterward the students discussed each shot and how they would improve things.

The students were not given limits in what they captured on film. Bueno instructed them to take pictures of whatever illustrated positive and negative aspects of their community.

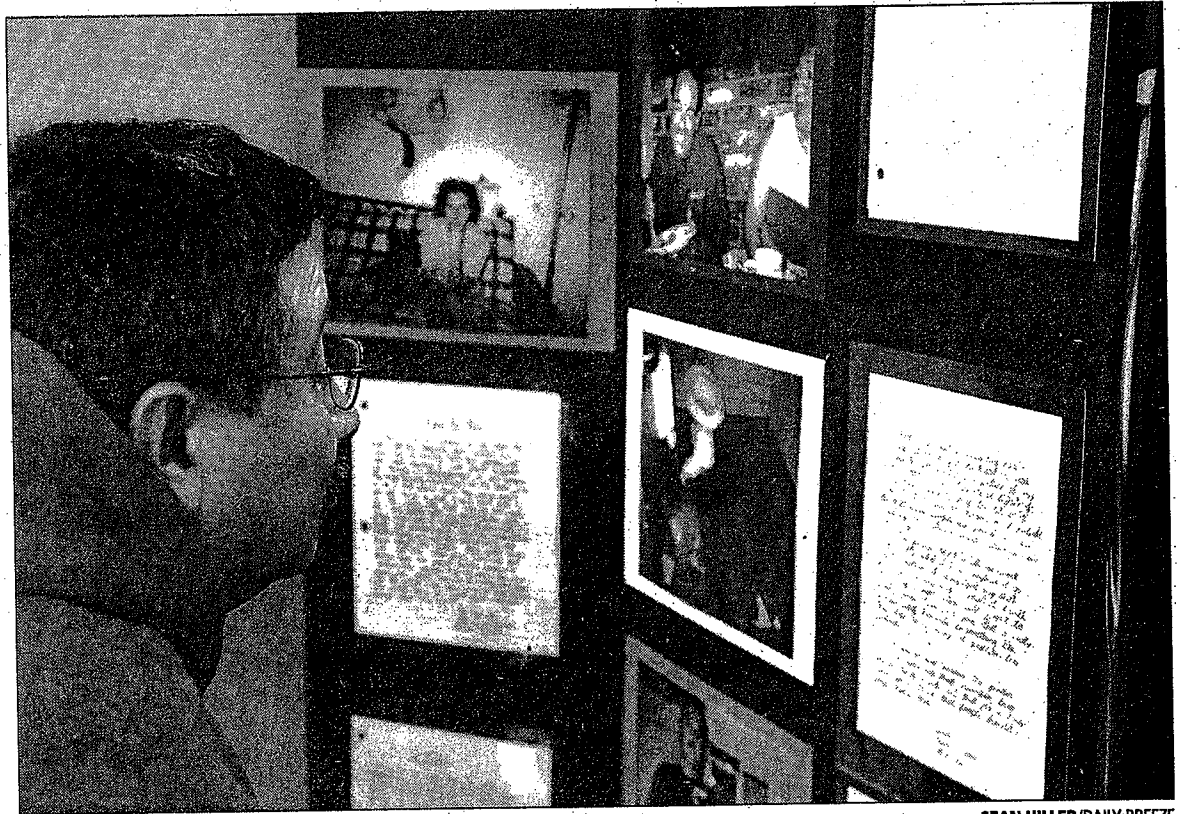
"It's up to them to figure out what they want to photograph. I just teach them the basics of photography," she said.

Garciela Ortega, mother of fourth-grader Jesenia Cuara, browsed through the exhibit on Friday.

"I'm really proud of her work," Ortega said as she studied a photo of a woman she knew growing up. "That's what caught my eye, the photo of this woman who I used to know. My daughter really captured some meaningful moments."

Ortega was surprised to see the woman, a

PHOTOS/A13



SEAN HILLER/DAILY BREEZE

Wilmington Park Elementary School custodian Ezequias Dominguez views photos and essays from some of the students who participated in the school's "Shoot with Cameras — Not with Guns" program.

PHOTOS: Program blends pictures, writing

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former school mentor she used to make lemonade with.

"It really brings back some memories," she said.

Fourth-grader Iselda Geraldo chose to use members of her family as her subjects.

"I love my sister and my father," Iselda said. At the time she took the picture only her father and sister were present.

"The photos just show a little piece of my family," she said.

But other students, like fifth-

grader Cristian Ramirez, took pictures of less appealing aspects.

In his photo, paper towels are shattered all over a restroom.

In his story he wrote, "People are disgusting because they have left paper all over the ground. ... I feel so bad because the janitor had to clean all that."

Bueno said the students reveal a lot about their personalities and how they see the world.

"You get an insight into each kid," she said. "We're asking them to be experts in their community."

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— ISELDA GERALDO,
fourth-grade student