

WAVE OF INSPIRATION.

Flash Flood draws crowd to river's dry banks for environmental awareness

By Ana Maria Trujillo

The New Mexican

It was a community event only the City Different can hold: Musicians wove through a crowd of more than 1,000 people who gathered Saturday in the dry riverbed of the Santa Fe River near San Ysidro Crossing to "turn it blue" as part of the public-art project Flash Flood for a Living River.

People danced, laughed, sang and chanted, "It's hot in here, there's too much carbon in the atmosphere."

Indeed, it was warm for a late-November morning, but Michelle LaFlamme-Childs, the residency, marketing and public-relations director for the Santa Fe Art Institute, said the weather was perfect for the collaboration between the art institute and Bill McKibben's 350.org, a worldwide campaign to find solutions for the climate-change crisis.

About 35 volunteers circulated in the crowd, making sure everyone had something blue to wave. Some made participants practice flipping their cardboard sheets from the brown side to the blue side so they would be picture-perfect for the cameras.

"One, two, three, blue," shouted one volunteer from a loudspeaker. "OK, now turn it brown." After several practice flips that left peoples' arms tired, it was time for the real deal.

At 10:53 a.m., a young volunteer began sprinting from one edge of the crowd to the other, with the community members flipping their cardboard sheets to the blue side as he passed by waving an orange flag. The volunteers held the signs, blue side up, for seven minutes while the aerial design was documented by a satellite, a helicopter and a 150-foot crane.

From Nov. 20 to Saturday, 350.org is coordinating more than a dozen major public-art installations across the world. A satellite company, DigitalGlobal, will be documenting the projects from space, providing images that will be shown at the Cancun Climate Change Summit running from Nov. 29 to Dec. 10.

Aside from Flash Flood in Santa Fe, 350.org events also were held Saturday in New York City and Delta de Ebro, Spain. In New York, a new mural on the roof of a Brooklyn school was photographed from 400 miles into space for the planetary-

scale art show. The mural depicted the New York and New Jersey coastlines after a 7-meter rise in sea levels.

In the Delta del Ebro area in Catalunya, Spain, people joined artist Jorge Rodriguez-Gerada to form a giant representation of the face of a young girl who wishes to see the delta survive the threat of climate change.

LaFlamme-Childs said in 2007, the Santa Fe River was named the most endangered river in the United States.

"I think many people don't realize that," she said. "This is not only an opportunity to bring attention to it in our immediate community, but globally."

According to LaFlamme-Childs, the events for Flash Flood compose the largest art exhibition in the world. She said McKibben contacted the Santa Fe Art Institute to ask that professional artists do a piece that would be visible from space. Diane Karp, the institute's executive director, opted to make it a community project instead. Local artists and schoolchildren painted recycled cardboard, with messages about protecting water and protecting the environment on the cardboard's blue background.

Nina Mastrangelo, an art teacher with Santa Fe Public Schools, said many of her students at Atalaya Elementary School and the Amy Biehl Community School painted pieces for the event.

"As an artist, doing a gigantic art piece that involves so much of the community in action is just unprecedented, and it's just awesome to be able to participate in that," Mastrangelo said. "I want my students to know that they can do something."

Many youth turned out for the event. Some even drove from The University of New Mexico.

Rhiannon Frazier, 18, found out about the event in her sustainability class at UNM, and decided to participate because the issue is important to her.

"It's important to me because our world is definitely calling out for help," said Frazier, an Albuquerque native. "We live in such a water-dry area (that) it's really important to me to try to save and conserve so this land will be fertile enough to live on for generations, because New Mexico is a great place."

Raina Wellman, 13, is interested in protecting the environment. As a young artist, she uses her talents to do just that. Recently, a skirt and dress she made earned her second place in the Recycle Santa Fe Art Festival.

"I'm really interested in the environment, and it's going to look really pretty with the river (being blue)," Raina said.

While the idea to have a community event on this scale was a good one, LaFlamme-Childs said it worked because of the unique population in the city.

"I think Santa Fe is superspecial," LaFlamme-Childs said, "I really do."

Contact Ana Maria Trujillo at 986-3084 or atrujillo@sfnewmexican.com.

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

ARGK Design, Capital High School, Coalition for Clean and Affordable Energy, Community Farm, DeVargas Middle School, Desert Academy, Earth Care International, EarthWorks Institute, Frenchy's Field and Commons community groups, Girls Go Green, IATSE Local 480, Institute of American Indian Arts, KSFR, Lamoreux Crane Service, McCune Charitable Foundation, Milagro Project, New Energy Economy, New Mexico Arts Commission, New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light, The Redford Institute, RegenesiS, River Source, Jim L. Salazar, Salazar Elementary School, Santa Fe Arts Commission, Santa Fe Business Alliance, Santa Fe Community College, Santa Fe Complex, Santa Fe congregations, Santa Fe County Trails & Open Spaces, Santa Fe Girls School, Santa Fe Parks Commission, Santa Fe Prep, Santa Fe Reporter, Santa Fe University of Art & Design, Santa Fe Trails, Santa Fe Watershed Association, state of New Mexico, Watershed West, WildEarth Guardians, YouthWorks.

COPYRIGHT 2010 The Santa Fe New Mexican