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Sunset Park Elementary fifth-grade students (left to right) Santiago Martinez, Anthony Trujillo, Isaiah Aguilar and Eva Dunich take part in the Junior Achievement leadership program Thursday.

EDUCATION

‘Innovation Nation’ comes to Sunset

Junior Achievement program stresses need for creative thinking

BY JON POMPIA
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

For a heavy sleeping tyke, a standard alarm clock often fails in its responsibility of rousing. Fortunately for students continually late for class, Janessa Lopez and three equally inspired Sunset Park Elementary fifth graders believe they

have arrived at a solution. The Slappy Clock. A non-wired unit that can't be unplugged, has no snooze button and, most importantly, "has a plastic hand that slaps you with a recording of your mom, dad or parents saying 'Wake up!,'" explained Caileigh McWilson. "And

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it comes with a security camera to see if you're awake or not so it knows when to stop." The gallery was impressed. "Wow! That's good." "Awesome!" "A great name!" The occasion for this hotbed of creative problem solving was "Innova-



Sunset Park Elementary fifth-grader Jeremiah Sheppard explains his group's invention — called the 'Mealinator' — which helps in food preparation.

tion Nation," an enterprising part of Junior Achievement's "JA Our Nation" program that introduces fifth-graders

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to the need for entrepreneurial and innovative thinking in today's high-tech, highly competitive free market.

Whether building a better and more effective alarm clock or pop-up toaster, making a lost cellphone easier to locate or fabricating a football that's easier to catch in cold weather (an implanted mini-heater is the key), the Sunset Park fifth-graders were tasked with looking at all facets of an entrepreneurial project, including resources needed.

"First," said Jeffrey Garcia of the Slappy Clock, "you'll need a human resource, because you need your mom to

scream into the voice recorder. Oh, and you'll need capital resources, because you need to build it."

The potential hazards? "It could make a mark on your face from the slap," Jeffrey added. "And there could be ringing in your ears for days."

And marketing? "It's important to have every commercial on the TV to be Slappy Clock until you buy it," stressed Kaylee Witherow.

Thursday's Junior Achievement presentation — various community leaders and notables served as facilitators — acted as a perfect complement to the "Leader in Me" model employed

at Sunset Park Elementary, a curriculum that incorporates "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People" to communicate to youngsters the importance of leadership and life skills.

"We believe there's nothing more important than teaching these kids how to be productive citizens," said Principal John Hull. "And we do that by being proactive, setting goals and then working toward achieving them, working with people in a spirit of empathy to arrive at solutions that are 'win-win.'"

The ultimate goal of both "Leader in Me" and the JA endeavor, Hull said, is to illustrate to

students the importance of a career, "to get kids to visualize the difference between 'I want to get a job when I get out of school' to 'I want to work toward my career' and setting those goals now so that they get used to working toward something."

"Entrepreneurs are the backbone of the United States," added Pueblo Junior Achievement Executive Director Mary Hammer. "So we want to see what ideas students can come up with to promote being an entrepreneur."

With a Slappy Clock and heated footballs obviously fantastic starting points.

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