

Activities shed light on solar energy

By [JONATHAN DALE](#), Staff Writer

Jordan Ho watched his cupcakes literally bake outside Saturday, his eyes squinting under the harsh sunlight, as he demonstrated a solar-powered oven he helped create as a solar-themed late celebration of Earth Day at Central Union High School.

"You can use your creativity to make kids learn about this and that they can build their own solar oven and bake their own food," said the 15-year-old ninth-grader from Willie Moreno Junior High in Calexico.

Ho's project was part of the Solar Schoolhouse, which was used by the Imperial Valley Regional Occupational Program as its highlight for the activity-laden day, which came nearly a week after the calendar Earth Day.

By joining forces with the fourth-annual Imperial Irrigation District-supported Solar Schoolhouse, this Earth Day celebration was all about the big yellow heat-lamp that hangs in our planet's sky.

"Earth Day is to think about conservation and natural resources; raising awareness of all those types of things" said IVROP environmental technician Stephanie Collins. "I think that (the Solar Schoolhouse) is really drawing attention to alternative fuel resources."

Power of the sun

Solar-powered miniature race cars, gushing fountains and ovens like that created by Ho and his partners dotted the CUHS quad area Saturday, proving solar energy can do a lot more than simply power roadside call boxes.

"It's something we started together with IID to encourage students to get hands-on and build projects rather than read it in a book," said Solar Schoolhouse coordinator Tor Allen.

Earlier in the school year, Allen and his company, Rahu — which handles the Solar Schoolhouse project — lent solar panels and small motors to students throughout the Valley as a means of encouraging them to create solar gadgets.

Students from Brawley Union High School, Calexico High, CUHS, Holtville High and Southwest High, as well as junior high kids from Willie Moreno and De Anza Junior High Schools in Calexico, were present to show off the results of year-long solar-themed projects.

"When you hold a solar panel in your hands and watch it make something work, you realize solar power works," Allen said. "This sort of ignites their imaginations for what can be done."

Collins said IVROP, which focuses on doing job training and helping youngsters learn of possible career paths, has combined itself with the Solar Schoolhouse on Earth Day for the past four years as a means of teaching kids about environmental jobs.

"Normally ROP does job training, but we do this because we have (local) grants that allow us to do environmental education," Collins said. "This is a major component: to talk about careers in the environment."

In the CUHS multipurpose room, youngsters worked on environmentally-themed arts and crafts that had a local flavor to them, such as coloring in pictures of wildflowers and learning to recycle.

"I was making birdhouses with hammers, nails and wood," said 8-year-old Kieran Vick of Yuma. "It's really, really fun, because you get to do fun activities."

>> Staff Writer [Jonathan Dale](#) can be reached at 337-3440 or at jdale@ivpressonline.com



[TODD KRAININ](#) PHOTO

FROM LEFT: Irvin Corrao and Bobby Mersmo demonstrate their solar-powered fountain in the quad of Central Union High School as part of an Earth Day celebration on Saturday.