2/9/83

Jeff Duran among his classmates at Branciforte Junior High.

Pete Amos/Sentinel

Only one in a series of achievements

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SANTA CRUZ — For Jeff Duran, the world is made up only of blurred images.

But this week his classmates at Branciforte Junior High School helped bring his world in focus a little more.

The group of seventh and eighth graders raised enough money to send the 14-year-old blind boy to a ski camp in Colorado, where he learned to soar down the slopes like any sighted person.

"They're great," Duran said of his classmates.

Duran, described as a "top student" by his teacher Judy Bunch, has been blind since the age of 3 — the result of too much Vitamin A.

His handicap hasn't stopped the eighth grader from learning to work a computer, earning good grades, and even kayaking down the Rogue River in Oregon last summer.

But Duran had never had a chance to ski, and his classmates decided to do something about it.

Bunch said she learned about BOLT, a ski camp for the blind, through an acquaintance and decided it would make a good class project.

She approached the students in her English, reading and careers classes and was greeted with enthusiasm.

"They loved it. The kids wanted to do something," she said.

And do something they did.

Without Duran's knowledge, the kids began a letter-writing and fundraising campaign.

Some wrote to government officials, others hounded their neighbors and still others contacted local clubs.

One student wrote a letter to the Lions Club and received $100 toward the $221 plane ticket to Colorado.

The rest raised the money a dollar at a time.

When the campaign was all over, the class had collected a total of $275.

"They did it all themselves," Bunch said.

Duran was surprised when he found out about his classmates' project.

"I couldn't believe it," he said. "I wouldn't have been able to do it without them."

He left for the camp at Vail, Colo., last week and spent his days skiing down the slopes of the well-known resort.

Duran said he was assigned an individual instructor who skied behind him and told him when to turn right or left.

On steeper slopes, the instructor would ski in front of Duran and he would follow the sound of his voice.

The best part of skiing, said Duran, is the speed. "I like a lot of speed. I like going really fast," he said.

Luckily, he didn't run into anything.

Bunch said Duran is an amazing student.

He not only earns A's and B's, but did some peer counseling for Bunch.

His goal in life is to become a computer programmer and he is currently learning how to operate a computer at the school.

He also roller skates once a week, loves to swim and has tried ice skating.

"Blindness is not an issue for him," said Bunch.

Duran hopes to pursue his new sport now that he has had a taste of it.

As for his classmates — Duran thinks "they're pretty neat."