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Work of Noted Photographer Featured at Tar Creek Conference



Photo by Gary Crow
Earl Dotter presented a slide show Wednesday at the Coleman Theatre of black-and-white photographs he has recently taken in the Tar Creek Superfund site. Dotter, a nationally known photojournalist, is in Miami for the National Conference on Tar Creek.

Tar Creek activists are hoping the exposure brought to the Superfund site — and the people who live in it — by a nationally known photographer will quicken cleanup efforts.

“With this quality of work, I think we can finally get the kind of exposure we need to bring attention to Tar Creek,” said Rebecca Jim, director of Local Environmental Action Demanded, or LEAD, a Tar Creek activist group.

Earl Dotter describes himself as an occupational photojournalist who specializes in photographing hazardous work.

He began his career in 1968, while a VISTA volunteer assigned to work among West Virginia coal miners.

“At that time, coal mining was the most dangerous work in America,” he said. “On average, a coal miner died at work every other day.”

Wednesday night at the Coleman Theatre, Dotter exhibited recent work he has done in the Tar Creek Superfund site and among rescue and construction workers at New York’s World Trade Center.

The exhibit was part of the National Conference on Tar Creek that is taking place in and around Miami through Saturday.

Working in black-and-white, Dotter has photographed Tar Creek residents in their contaminated homes, remediation workers digging up yards and school children boarding the buses that take them to their classes.

“I am trying to follow the buses on a tour of the Superfund site,” Dotter said. “I’d like to take viewers all over the site with photographs.”

His Tar Creek pictures include newborns with potentially toxic blood levels of lead being cuddled by their mothers and poked by doctors who are studying them; women trying to clean dust from their homes; warning signs; abandoned picnic grounds in the shadows of huge chat piles; panoramics from atop the huge chat piles, and Harvard researchers who are studying the hazardous conditions in the Superfund site.

“He does have an eye that puts us in a story,” Jim said. “We see these things everyday. We’re used to them, but we need for people elsewhere to see them and understand what is going on.”