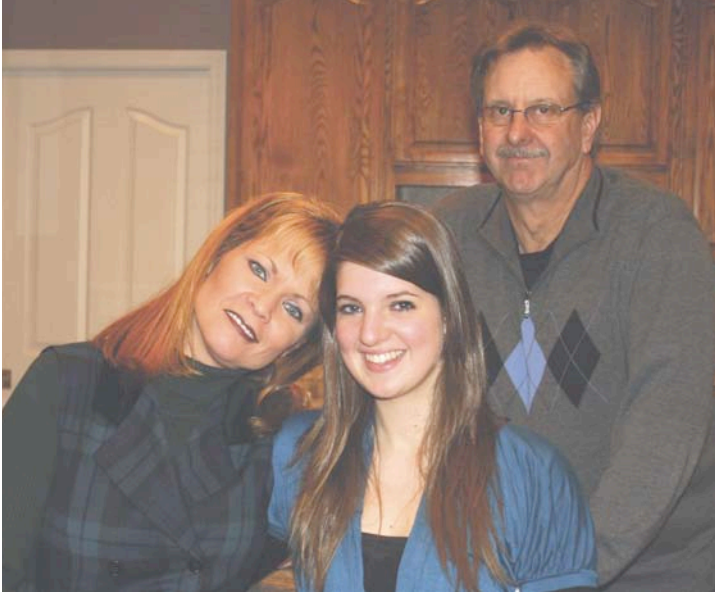


Exchange Student from Spain Explores Life in Lafayette

By Andrea A. Firth



Jessica Pallares (right) with Margot and Terry Camp Photo Andrea Firth

Jessica Pallares describes her first day at Aacalanes High School as a “little scary.” This is not an unusual reaction for a new student in a large high school, but the transition was even more challenging for 17 year-old Jessica who had just arrived from Spain as an exchange student through the Rotary International Program. “I had to color code my schedule and follow a map to find my classes,” she explains. However in just three months, Jessica has found her way. Her English vocabulary has grown exponentially, and she converses comfortably about her life in Lafayette with her hosts Terry and Margot Camp.

Jessica met Terry Camp in her hometown, La Coruna, while helping with a community service project refurbishing a soccer field and playground. La Coruna is an historic city that sits on a peninsula overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. A busy commercial and fishing port with 350,000 residents, it is dotted

with ancient forts and lookouts and boasts the oldest active lighthouse in the world.

“She was the only teenager who showed up every day, early, on time,” notes Terry. Jessica had dreams of traveling to the United States from a young age. As the Camp and Pallares families became friends, the opportunity for an exchange seemed like a natural fit.

“I really like Lafayette, it’s a really good city. It’s one of the best,” states Jessica. However, she admits to missing some things. “I miss my mom’s cooking.” To which Margot, her host mother, teasingly responds, “Ouch.” But Jessica is quick to rectify the situation reassuring Margot that she is a great cook and explaining that what she misses are some of the traditional Spanish foods such as tortilla Espanola, an omelette made with potatoes, and empanadas, pastry stuffed with meat, chicken or fish.

“School is really different here,” says Jessica. “Acalanes is

probably three or four times larger than my school in Spain. We spend all day in the same classroom with the same students.” She finds that the larger setting and movement around campus provides many more opportunities to meet a variety of young people. When asked about the differences in freedoms allowed teens in Spain versus the United States, Jessica says, “Kids in the U.S. can drive at 16 years old. This changes your life. The driving age in Spain is 18. But in other ways it is more strict.”

She keeps busy after school with practice for the Junior Varsity Girls Basketball Team. Although she has yet to see much court time, she enjoys being part of the team and is looking forward to improving her play. In addition, Jessica is participating in a seasonal play at the Camp’s church in Walnut Creek. She has traveled to Mount Shasta with the Camps and has plans to visit Lake Tahoe. She will also travel with other exchange students from around the world on a Rotary-sponsored trip called the Western Safari that will take her to Los Angeles, Las Vegas, parts of Arizona, and Disneyland.

When she returns to Spain next fall, Jessica will complete her senior year of high school and plans to go on to college to possibly study interior design or architecture. However, she hopes to return to northern California and may consider attending school here. That sounds just fine to the Camps, “Having Jessica here is the most awesome experience we’ve ever had.”