

## Lafayette Kids say “Hola!”

By Jean Follmer



Happy Valley Spanish Club

Photos Jean Follmer

Lafayette resident Margaret Grover-Roos spent much of her childhood in Mexico City. Although she grew up speaking English at home, she attended bilingual schools. Margaret moved to the Bay Area to attend college at Stanford University. Fluent in both English and Spanish, she knew she wanted to share her gift of language with her children. Her husband is fluent in English and Czech, so they raised their three children in a trilingual home. Margaret's oldest son entered elementary school speaking three languages and finished speaking only English. Margaret “didn't want the next two (children) to have that experience.” With the encouragement of friends and neighbors, Margaret created an environment in which students could learn and practice Spanish daily. Viva el Español was born! If you're not familiar with Viva el Español, it's located on Golden Gate Way across from the LASF offices.

The school offers Spanish programs to preschoolers through adults and classes are offered both on and off-site.

Margaret's neighbor, Amy Williams, had told Margaret “If

you build it, we will come.” True to her word, Amy's daughter, Georgina, was Viva el Español's “first student on the first day of school.” Amy said “Spanish is very practical; it's been a tremendous experience for my children and (learning it) has been almost effortless for my youngest daughter” Georgina who started at age three. Her older daughter, Cecelia, began attending the school at age six. Georgina is currently in the Los Bilingüitos class and Cecelia attends the elementary class.

Although the Lafayette public schools don't offer foreign language until middle school, many parents wanted it in the elementary schools. Lafayette resident Barry McQuain often sees the need for a second language in his profession. A hedge fund manager who routinely travels to Asia, he says “Europeans speak more languages. I (often) can't hire Americans because they only speak English.” A Happy Valley Elementary parent, Barry and his wife, Karla, felt Spanish was the natural language to start with “given the demographics of California”. After determining a strong interest among Happy Valley parents, the Happy

Valley Spanish Club was launched.

The first year involved a video based program that had been used in Oregon. The Club included 105 students and 70 parent volunteers. Seven of the parent volunteers were fluent in Spanish. After the first year, Barry said he was “pleased but not ecstatic about the amount of Spanish we learned.”

Happy Valley decided to change their approach and pursue hiring an instructor. They contacted Margaret Grover-Roos and Viva el Español offered Spanish at Happy Valley before school the following year. The class was so popular, there was a waiting list of 25 students. The McQuains are given a lot of credit for getting the program going, but they acknowledge Viva el Español's vital role. Barry said “Maybe I was the guy that pushed it in the first year or two, but Margaret's program really helped” get things going. Two of McQuain's daughters are in the 4th grade and their third year of the Happy Valley Spanish Club. Happy Valley 2nd grader, Jack Latin, recently moved here from Portland, Oregon. Jack attended a full-time Spanish immersion program at his public school in Portland. He said “I learned everything in Spanish.” Jack really enjoys Spanish saying “I like it because you learn how to speak a different language and you get to learn cool words in Spanish.” Jack's mother, Dina was glad to learn of the Happy Valley program so Jack could continue speaking Spanish daily. Grover-Roos says “We're very proud of what we've done in the elementary schools. Every day makes a difference.”

In addition to the school at 3451 Golden Gate Way, Viva el

Español now offers classes at all of the elementary schools and at Stanley Middle School in Lafayette and at Los Perales Elementary in Moraga. The non-profit school also holds classes outside of Lamorinda in communities such as San Leandro, Walnut Creek, Alameda and Pleasanton. The school offers a variety of programs, including parent & child, music based, art based, adult medical Spanish and week-long summer camps based on themes, and a spring break family trip to Mexico as well as enriching fieldtrips throughout the year. For more information, please visit [www.vivaelespanol.org](http://www.vivaelespanol.org).



Margaret Grover-Roos of ¡Viva el Español!