

By Carolyn Lee

The Imperial Republican

His senior year of high school is very different for Francisco Valero. Instead of living in a city of 15,000 people, he's living in Champion and going to school in Imperial.

Valero, known to his friends as Fran, is living with Ron and Dena Taylor of Champion for a year under the "Education First" exchange program. His father found it on the Internet.

"I liked the idea to come here for a year because I want to be an English teacher in Spain," he explained. Valero is from Campo de Criptana in the province of Ciudadreal in the center of Spain. It is one and one-half hours from Madrid.

The 16-year-old is a senior at Chase County Schools. Next year he will be in college in Spain. Valero has been studying English since he was six years old. He also studied French for three years.

Spain has a different system of education than the U.S. Students still begin school when they're five years old. The primary school is for grades one through six.

Students then attend the secondary school. There they choose a program of study that they plan to continue in college.

Valero chose humanities. There are also technology and biology programs, he said.

As in the U.S., students study world history, geography, literature, biology, math, chemistry, geology, physics and English. They also study the Spanish language.

School in Spain begins at 8:15 a.m. and ends at 2:15 p.m. There are no sports in the schools. Those who want to play sports join clubs.

The clubs play against different clubs in different provinces, traveling by bus.

Valero began playing tennis when he was five years old. He switched to soccer until he was nine, then played two years of basketball, before returning to tennis.

At CCS he's a linebacker on the Longhorn football team, a sport he'd never played. He likes the kicking part of football.

However, he prefers basketball, and looks forward to the winter Longhorn basketball season.

One aspect of going to school at CCS Valero enjoys the most is the facilities, such as the gymnasiums, and all of the sports equipment. Schools in Spain don't have such things, he said, because sports are separate from school.

When school is out for the day in Spain, Valero spends four days a week training for tennis. On the weekends he and friends go to discotheques.

The summer is a time for play, he said. But, in August and September he gets a job harvesting grapes, as there are many wineries in the area.

Valero is an only child. His father is a businessman and his mother is a housewife.

One other reason the senior wanted to live in the U.S. for a year is to improve his English so he can be a translator for his father when he travels outside of Spain on business.

Although he's only lived in Champion for a month, Valero was quick to answer the question, "What's your favorite American food?"

Barbeque and corn on the cob!