

# Student from Spain adapting to life on Sebek dairy farm

By Matthew Johnson

Most days at this time of year it's about 70 degrees Fahrenheit outside – in Madrid, Spain.

But César Alcaraz, 16, from Hoyo de Manzanares, a suburb of Spain's capital city of Madrid, is adapting nicely to his temporary home in rural Sebek where he is living with Darell and Sally Richter, their son Casey, playful dog Charlie, and, last but not least, a pet bull-calf that has been affectionately named after César.

César, a foreign exchange student with the International Student Exchange (ISE) program, gets along well with the same-named animal, as well as the many other cattle at the Richter Farms dairy, where he now works along side his host brother Casey.

"He's not used to being so cold," said host mom Sally. "We had to go and get him a big winter coat."

César said he has experienced cold weather, but for shorter periods of time, in the mountains of Spain, where he goes skiing. But most of the time he enjoys the warmer climate in the town where he lives among about 7,000 people. There he lives with his parents and younger siblings (a brother and two sisters) and the family dog. His mother works as a pharmacist and his father works in finance.

César's father, who is aware of the opportunities available in foreign exchange programs, asked César if he would be interested in coming to the United States to improve his English speaking skills and learn the American culture. César, whose primary language is Spanish, said yes, because he agreed with his father that it could be a good experience for him.

At home, César enjoys playing video games with his brother and spending time with grandparents and uncles.



ing basketball with friends. Basketball is also one of his favorite activities in Sebek, because it is a familiar game that he enjoys. He also participates in baseball here, and plays the xylophone in the Sebek High School Band. "I'm learning," he said.

And he is learning with one of the best rural high school band programs in Minnesota, from one of the best high school band directors – Dave Kerkvliet – affectionately referred to by the entire community as "Mr. K."

"Mr. K has taken a little extra time to help him," said Sally.

César is looking forward to a trip with the SHS band to Disney World in Florida coming up November 17 through November 24. "That should

César said that back home he sees farm animals from a distance, but never gets close enough to touch them. That is one thing that makes this time with the Richters extra special for him. He even milks cows and feeds the calves now.

"It's a lot of work (on the farm), but it's pretty cool . . . something new," said César.

Students in César's ISE program do not get to choose exactly where in the U.S. they will be sent. One of César's friends from his class back home is also participating in the program, and he is currently located in a more populated area in Oklahoma. The two friends communicate via text messages and Skype.

César said one stark difference between Sebek

too many people in his town to get to know them all, but here in Sebek, most of the people know everyone. "And the people are so nice (here)," he said.

César enjoyed a recent trip with the Richters to Itasca State Park north of Park Rapids. "Yeah, that was pretty fun," he said. "I liked climbing the (fire) tower and looking at the leaves."

César is also looking forward to participating in the annual Richter family deer hunt which is coming up soon, minus being able to shoot a gun or drive a vehicle due to exchange program regulations. He said it is "pretty cool" that teens can start driving at the age of 16 here; in Spain they must wait until they turn 18.

in front of him at meal time, but he's mainly "a meat and potatoes" kind of guy who is not real keen on fruits and vegetables. He said basically the same types of foods are available at home, they are just prepared in different ways.

One aspect of the Sebek School he likes is that "everybody is so nice and friendly." His favorite subject is algebra, and he says algebra class here is less challenging than in his school back at home.

César is scheduled to return home in May, and will have one more year of high school to complete in Spain. He said he is not sure yet about what he will do after that, but he is thinking of

possibly joining the Spanish Army.

This is the Richter's first time hosting an exchange student. ISE Regional Advisor Yvonne "Vonnice" Stewart of Sebek, under the leadership of ISE Regional Director Rose Hawkin, approached the family about hosting an exchange student. Darell and Sally thought it over and decided this would be a good time. They have three older daughters and Casey, their youngest and only son, is the only child still living at home. He is the same age as César, and someone for César to hang around with.

"He's a good kid," said Sally. "He's been a lot of fun."