

Exchange program teaches English to the world's students

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THIS WEEK

ST. CATHARINES – While Ixe Gullermo is one of 80 or so foreign students Ontario Trillium Exchange arranges to come to St. Catharines to learn English, his case is unique.

Most of the students brought in by Shelley Marsala's family-run business come from families who can afford airfare, tuition and spending money. This year however, Marsala, who has been matching host families with the students for four and a half years, decided it was time to give the opportunity to someone less fortunate.

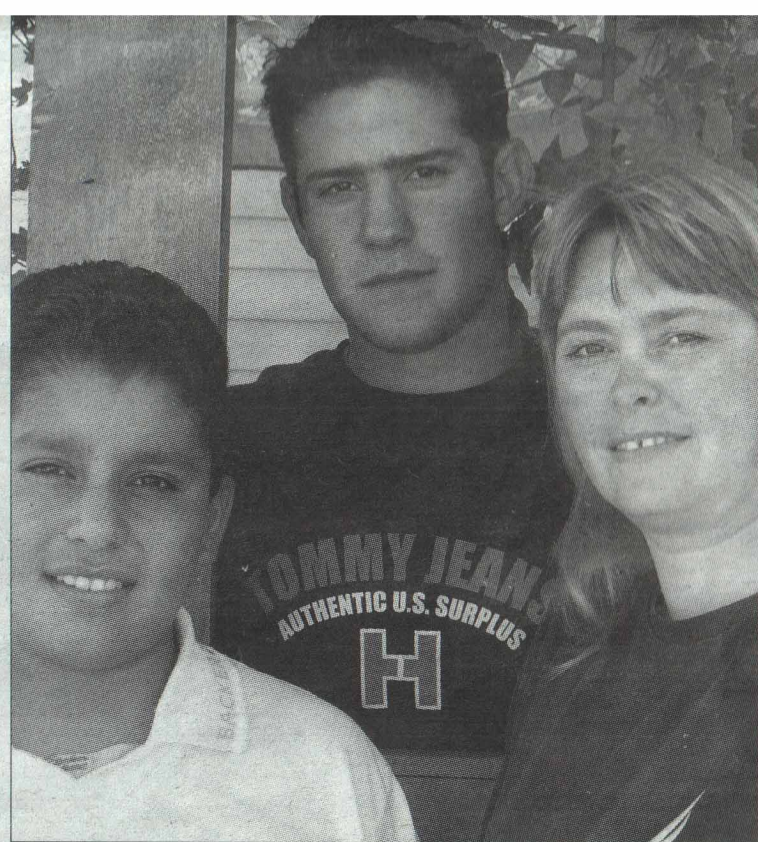
Through Marsala's trips to Mexico to develop contacts, she visited Artega, a sleepy northern village of about 1,000 people who typically live on \$6 or \$7 a day. She approached the leaders of the Baptist church and asked them to find a child who would most benefit from the cultural and educational exchange. They suggested 13-year-old Gullermo, who is at the top of his class.

The church paid for his airfare,

and Marsala looked for sponsors to keep him here for the five-and-a-half-week summer program. Through generous donations from the Welland Avenue Canadian Tire, Monogram Studio, Hoogasian Insurance, Tora Inc. and lawyer Luigi Delizio, she was able to raise \$1,200. As well, the Niagara Catholic District School Board, which runs English as a second language camps, lowered its tuition. There was still a shortfall, which was made up by Marsella's company.

And the result? When Gullermo first arrived here in July, he could barely speak a word of English. But now, barely a month later, he can, with a little difficulty, carry on a conversation. When he gets back to Mexico, his language skills will open doors for him. Like many places in our globalized world, English is essential to have a decent career.

Gullermo said he'd like to dig up dinosaurs as a paleontologist when he gets older and drive a Jeep to work. When he goes back to Mexico, he said he's going to do his best to teach some English to his family and friends. His father,



Ixe Gullermo, left, with his host Shelley Marsala and Leo Campo, a Mexican exchange student studying at Brock.

who works at a nearby auto factory, knows how to speak it a little, so he'll be able to keep practising.

Gullermo said he won't forget the time he spent in Canada, the cities he visited and the things he did. Some of these activities include whitewater rafting near Ottawa and going to Canada's Wonderland and Marineland.

"Niagara Falls is awesome," he

said, awesome being a word he picked up from Marsala.

Marsala said she plans to continue bringing at least one less fortunate child a year to St. Catharines. With enough fundraising, enough people giving just a little bit of time, effort and money will make it possible.

"People think it takes a lot to make a difference in people's lives, but it really doesn't," she said.