

# The Herald

## Medical student right at home in Cameron Park

By LAURA B. MARTINEZ  
The Brownsville Herald

October 3, 2004 — Just about every day Ryan Gregory wakes up to the sound of hands patting masa for corn tortillas.

It's not unusual at the crack of dawn for him to hear a rooster's loud crow coming from a neighbor's yard.



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"It is so much more tranquil than what I usually wake up with — a buzzer alarm or clock radio," Gregory said.

By the time he's finished taking his morning shower, breakfast is waiting for him on the table.

It can be a gordita filled with meat and beans, papas con huevo or chorizo con huevo, breakfasts' that are a typical in a Mexican household.

For the past six weeks Gregory, a fourth-year medical student at the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston, has made Juan and Epifania Banda's house on Jeffrey Street his home in Cameron Park. The Bandas agreed to take in the 30-year-old medical student for two months while he works at local clinics and churches.

"I joke with them that the only thing that I am worried about is how much weight I'm gaining because they are feeding me so well," Gregory said, and complimented his hostess. "She cooks awesome."

During the day, Gregory works at the Brownsville Community Health Center in Cameron Park. On weekends, he helps out at the BCHC on East 22nd Street and with health fairs at Casa Digna at San Felipe de Jesus Catholic Church in Cameron Park — an undeveloped community with more than 6,000 residents. It's a place where lots are cheap and the average annual household income is a little more than \$4,000.

Gregory, an Arlington native, is a 1998 graduate of the University of Texas at Austin.

His father is an airline pilot and his mother is practicing acupuncture. Gregory said life with his own family is pretty much like the one he has with the Bandas. When he lived at home, the family would gather at the dinner table for a meal.

At a recent health fair at Cameron Park, Gregory examined 54-year-old Enendina Zamarripa, who was suffering from a severe thyroid problem.

He explained to her in Spanish what was causing the problem and the type of treatment she should receive.

Zamarripa said she was glad that medical students such as Gregory were providing her with medical care.

The Bandas opened their home to Gregory after a call went out at the San Felipe church for a family to host a medical student that would move to the area temporarily and need a place to stay.

Recognizing the need for medical care in their community, the Bandas saw their opportunity to help.

"For us it is something very good," Juan Banda said. "We've never had someone live here who is not family. We thought it would be something interesting and good to do."

Epifania Banda calls her tenant "el doctor."

"We are very happy to have him here because he talks to us about his food, living habits and English," Epifania said. "We help him with his Spanish and he helps us with English."

"I was just worried because I wasn't sure he would like the food I cook because I cook Mexican food," she said with a laugh.

The Bandas consider Gregory part of the family and refer to him as "el nuevo hijo grande," or "the new eldest son."

Epifania makes him breakfast in the morning and has dinner waiting for him when he comes home.

Gregory's favorites are Mexican enchiladas with white cheese and gorditas.

At dinnertime, the Bandas and Gregory sit around the dinner table.

The conversation is in Spanish. Topics range from what's happening in the news to health care.

Gregory even learned about the recent prison release of Mexican pop star Gloria Trevi. He had no idea who she was.

They talk about Gregory's views on Cameron Park and the lack of medical care for residents there. They discuss the history of the colonia and how it has grown during the past two years.

"It's a lot more social than what I am used to, which is nice," said Gregory who lives alone in a one-bedroom apartment in Galveston.

"It's nice when you get up in the morning to see some people there you know and say, 'How's it going?' and, 'What are you doing today?'"

This is the first year that UTMB-Galveston is offering the chance for medical students to live and work in a community as part of an elective course.

Dr. Kirk L. Smith, director of Frontera de Salud, or Healthy Border, and who heads up the course, said medical students need to live in underserved communities such as Cameron Park to see what works in terms of giving medical advice.

"If I tell people they need to do an exercise program, but if they don't have sidewalks ... you need to actually know how to translate your medical, nursing or allied health knowledge into what people can use (in) their homes and communities," Smith said.

Gregory will return to Galveston in about two weeks. He wants to practice internal medicine.

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