

Venezuelan student right at home at Long Lane jam

By John Brayfield

Seventeen-year-old Gabriel Pizzolante looked right at home, as he sat in with the musicians at the Long Lane weekly jam, even if he wasn't.

The weekly jam session at Long Lane is used to having outsiders--outsiders from Bolivar, Springfield or Preston--not from Venezuela.

Pizzolante, a senior at Buffalo High School is an exchange student, whose home town of Caracas, Venezuela, is located in the extreme north of South America bordered by the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean between Columbia and Guyana. He is spending the school year living in Long Lane with his host family Ron and Judi Locke.

Venezuela, considered a tropical climate with terrain that runs the gamut from sandy beaches and sea ports to rain forests and high, rugged mountains is quite different

from what Pizzolante has experienced in Dallas County.

"The weather in my country is much different from here," Pizzolante says. "I saw snow for the first time a couple of weeks ago. We never have snow except in the mountains. Snow is okay, but I wouldn't want it all the time."

Pizzolante says that he finds the difference in size of his South American home and his Dallas County home quite remarkable.

"I am most impressed with the size of Buffalo. My home, Caracas, has about four million people living there," Pizzolante said. "Buffalo seems very small compared to where I live. There isn't much to do in the country, like there is in the city, but I feel that getting to live on a farm with my host family has made a very big impact on me."

Venezuela is about twice the size of California with a total population of 23,916,810



Gabriel Pizzolante, right, an exchange student from Venezuela, receives a few tips on playing guitar from Joe Smith at a recent Thursday night Long Lane jam session.

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as of July 2001.

Pizzolante also admits that school functions here are a bit different than they are in Venezuela.

"I really enjoy the events in school like homecoming with the spirit week, the assemblies and the cheerleaders. These kinds of things are very different in my school," Pizzolante said. "Our schedules are very different also. We don't have to see every class every day. You don't get to choose your classes. You are in one classroom all day and the teachers come to you. You share the classroom with only people of your grade and sometimes you have free time depending on your grade."

Pizzolante, dressed in a windbreaker and blue jeans and sporting a face painted black and white in observance of Spirit Week during last week's homecoming festivities, says that kids in Venezuela dress pretty much the same as kids in Buffalo except for some very definite differences in fashion.

"In my home, we don't wear overalls or big boots and cowboy hats because it is a city," Pizzolante jokes. "Other than that I really don't see much difference."

One of the first things Pizzolante did when he arrived in the United States was to buy a guitar. He has taken a couple of lessons and although most

of the songs he plays are in Spanish he still enjoys hearing the locals.

"I went to the jam session at Long Lane last week and sat in the circle of musicians as they took turns playing," said Pizzolante. "At first I was not sure what was going on. But they were very nice and Joe Smith showed me a few of the chords they were playing and I was able to play along. I didn't sing though, because I only know Spanish songs."

Although Pizzolante's native language is Spanish he says his name is actually an Italian name and that someday he hopes to learn to speak Italian and visit Italy. He also has hopes of going on to college and being a chemical engineer.

"Chemistry is my favorite subject and I like to study it at home when I'm not playing the piano, playing the guitar or going out with my friends," says Pizzolante. "Here in Dallas County I like to play the guitar, take pictures, talk on the phone, watch movies, listen to music and write e-mails."

Pizzolante comes by his musical and cyberspace interests naturally--his father is a piano tuner and his mother is a manager at a Website company. His family also includes an older brother, Fabio and an older sister, Leanny.

Although Pizzolante's first language is Spanish, he speaks

English quite well and doesn't seem that different from most kids his age in Dallas County. His favorite TV shows are Friends and The Simpsons. His favorite music to listen to is punk and alternative rock and his favorite food is McDonald's hamburgers.

The Lockes, Pizzolante's host parents, say that they have truly enjoyed the experience of having Gabriel in their home and that like most teenagers he sometimes puts off doing his homework, he likes to kick back on the week-

ends and he's usually much quieter around adults than with his friends at school.

What will Pizzolante say about Dallas County when he gets home?

"I will tell them back home that I had a good time in this place," Pizzolante said. "I met nice people here and I enjoyed this experience learning a new language and staying with a family. I have had fun with the friends I now have in this town. I will never regret coming here and I won't forget Buffalo."



Exchange student Gabriel Pizzolante from Venezuela with host family Ron and Judi Locke from Long Lane.