

# Cabarrus Neighbors

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CABARRUS

## Teachers, students share cultures

### Faculty *from 1K*

One in 10 applicants is accepted.

The program's goal is to provide students with not only instruction, but also interaction with another culture, so they will be more tolerant and better prepared for a more global economy.

#### Culture shared many ways

At the elementary school level, Australian teacher Kerry Thrift shares her culture in the classroom in many ways.

She names her groups of first-graders at A.T. Allen Elementary "kookaburras," "echidnas," "koalas," "wombats," "kangaroos" and "dingoes" - all Australian animals.

In classroom conversations, Thrift drops words like "pram" instead of baby carriage, or "mum" instead of "mom."

"She has an accent. And I like the animals," said Jade Weeks, 6.

This has been quite a cultural experience for Thrift, too. She's been here for 2½ years now.

When Thrift, 34, first arrived, she was to stay for a week with the family of school office assistant Jill Lewis, until she could get her own apartment. But they all liked the arrangement, and she didn't want to live alone, so she stayed on with the Lewises.

"Instead of one week, they got me for 2½ years," Thrift said.

To show how little some peo-



CHRISTOPHER A. RECORD - STAFF PHOTO

**Kerry Thrift talks to her class at A.T. Allen Elementary about the time difference between her native Australia and the United States.**

ple know of other cultures, Thrift said many Australians think they know the United States through television - and many Americans think they know Australia through "The Crocodile Hunter."

"I had never watched that show until I came here," she said.

#### A little bit of Botswana

Students taking biotechnology at J.N. Fries Middle School found a little corner of Botswana in Amir Singh Kadyan's classroom.

Kadyan, 57, Indian by ancestry, has set up a corner with maps, photos, the Botswana flag and other information about the African country where he taught for 13 years. In all, he taught nearly 30 years in Africa.

He said many of his students don't know how free the wildlife is in Africa.

"They say, 'Can we go and touch a lion?' Some of them don't know lions can be seen in the open."

Students ask him about the food, the schools, his family. Many don't know anything about Botswana, or even where it is, Kadyan said.

His wife, Saras, came with him to Concord.

All of the teachers say they've found some things surprising about the United States.

Ballesteros, 35, from Spain's Cordoba province, talks to his students about all of them driving their separate cars, without ride-

sharing, to school in the morning.

How is it, he wonders, that Americans have to drive everywhere?

"Anytime during the day, afternoon or evening, you don't see people walking, something as simple as walking," he said during a break between classes. "There are no sidewalks."

"If there were no cars, what would you do?"

Although Ballesteros questions some things here, such as not enough recycling stations around the county, he does like the friendliness of the people, he said.

"There are things I don't like, and like," he said. "I try to learn from them all."

Robinson Principal David Wright said he likes having the three international teachers this year, all of whom teach Spanish. Even if there's no teacher shortage in the future, Wright said, he'd still want to hire some international teachers.

Sharing cultures - such as Ballesteros talking to his students about recycling or the values of walking or bicycling - is just the kind of thing he wants his students exposed to.

"I like them hearing an accent," Wright said, "so when they hear it, they know there is another world. ... There are options and alternatives to our lives and how we do things."

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CHRISTOPHER A. RECORD - STAFF PHOTO

This year, the Cabarrus County school district has more staffers from the Visiting International Faculty program than ever - 18. First-grade teacher Kerry Thrift (Australia) works with Leah Faggart, 6, at A.T. Allen Elementary School.

## Teachers and students share their cultures

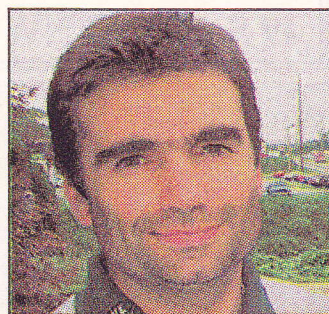
*Program lets foreign instructors learn our ways, and us theirs*

BY GAIL SMITH-ARRANTS  
Staff Writer

Jose Ballesteros rides his bicycle to school. But he started having second thoughts after a driver yelled at him as he pedaled precariously along U.S. 29.

Ballesteros isn't a student. He's a teacher from Spain. At Jay M. Robinson High School, he teaches Spanish as part of the Visiting International Faculty Program.

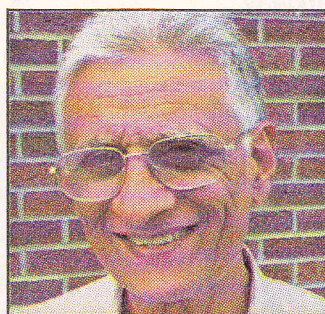
"He's a rebel," said one of his Spanish III students, Kaiser



Jose Ballesteros (Spain) teaches Spanish at Jay M. Robinson High.

Goodridge, 17, a senior. "He rides his bike to school. He thinks it's Spain. It's something he'll learn from."

Well, the school year is young yet, and administrators hope the students will learn from Ballesteros. That's the way the program is supposed



Amir Singh Kadyan (Botswana) teaches biotechnology at J.N. Fries Middle.

to work. The teachers share their culture, their country and their way of thinking with American students.

They are not just teachers. You could call them educational ambassadors.

This year, 18 teachers are working in the Cabarrus

County Schools through the program - the most ever. A side benefit is that the teachers help fill teaching positions during a severe teacher shortage, said Charlie Williams, the system's human resources director.

Some teach English as a second language, a critical need for many school districts in the region. The Kannapolis City Schools have three international faculty program teachers this year - two teach in the English as a second language program and one teaches Spanish.

The international faculty program, headquartered in Chapel Hill, interviews teachers from more than 40 countries for cultural exchange.

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