

Columbia senior aims for career in medicine

TEEN OF THE WEEK – Lancaster
Intelligencer Journal/New Era
(Saturday, September 17, 2011)

BY LAURA KNOWLES, Correspondent

As a top student at Columbia High School, Quiz Bowl member, student council treasurer and tennis team member, Marilyn Ngo is surely self-motivated.

Yet the 17-year-old senior gives much of the credit to her parents, Tan Ngo and Hoa Nguyen.

"My parents have encouraged me every step of the way. I am very proud of the way they raised me," Marilyn said.

And they are obviously proud of their daughter.

As she starts her search for a college, one of the top schools on her list is the University of Pittsburgh. She is looking for a top-notch pre-med program.

Not surprisingly, the A+ student hopes to become a doctor someday.

"I'm not sure what my specialty will be. I will wait until I get to medical school and know more about the possibilities," she said.

Marilyn is the youngest of three daughters. Born in Lancaster, she is the only one of the three born in the United States. Her parents immigrated here from Vietnam with her sisters, Cindy, 30, now a married mother of three, and Uyen, 28, a pharmacist.

While her sisters were born in Vietnam, Marilyn didn't see her ancestral homeland until she was in fifth grade. The family visited relatives in Vietnam, and Marilyn can still recall being impressed with the abundance of fresh tropical fruits, many of which she had never seen or tasted before. She also was amazed at the hustle and bustle of the cities, where bicycles, scooters and pedestrians created a free-for-all of traffic.

"It seemed very busy and confusing with no traffic signals or stop signs," she said. "I couldn't imagine how they got around like that."

Back at home in Lancaster County, Marilyn appreciates the quiet life and the closeness of her friends from high school. They like nothing better than to relax on the weekends for movie



night or perhaps an afternoon of shopping.

Her parents are very traditional Vietnamese, who came to the United States through the Mennonite Church. Tan Ngo works for R.R. Donnelley in Lancaster, and his wife works at Shank's Extracts in Leola.

"I'm the youngest and the only one still at home," Marilyn said. "And as the baby, I admit that I am a little spoiled."

One of her favorite things is to enjoy a bowl of pho, a Vietnamese noodle dish that is filled with vegetables, meat and rice noodles in a broth. She is also quite fond of fresh spring rolls, as well as many American dishes that she has grown up with.

Marilyn was named after a nurse at Lancaster General Hospital who

helped to deliver her. The pronunciation sounds much like the Vietnamese version of her name. She appreciates the mixture of cultures that gives her a firm foundation and many opportunities.

Marilyn loves numbers and math. She is especially taken with calculus. She also is intrigued by English and history. Her incredible memory and a mind for trivia made her the ideal candidate for captain of her high school Quiz Bowl team. She puts her math skills to work as treasurer of student council.

To make sure her years in high school are not just about cerebral pursuits, Marilyn is a member of her high school tennis team. She enjoys the physical workout and the grace of the sport, which combines individual accomplishment with teamwork.

She loves travel, too. Her family has traveled to Toronto to visit relatives, and she also had the chance to visit Italy and France as part of the Project Forward Leap, which provides opportunities for world travel.

"I loved Florence the best, and Paris. The art, the culture and the shopping were amazing," she said.

Marilyn admits to having a few eclectic tastes. She likes Japanese music as well as Lady Gaga and classical music. She admits to a few secret TV favorites such as "The Simpsons" and "The Golden Girls."

She also volunteers at the Columbia Public Library and has been involved in a mentoring program at Lancaster General Hospital with an orthosurgeon.

"I have a lot of different interests, but one day I am most interested in helping others and making my parents proud of me," Marilyn said.