

Springdale Catholic is surprised to become Miss Arkansas Latina

written by Special to Arkansas Catholic |

SPRINGDALE — When Maritza de la Torre was crowned Miss Arkansas Latina 2012 recently, no one was more surprised than the winner herself.

Except, perhaps, her parents. That's because the newly crowned beauty queen from Springdale didn't tell her family she had entered a beauty pageant.

"I was so sure I was not going to win," de la Torre recalled. "I was pretty sure I was going to lose."

With that sense of confidence — in losing — she feared her parents would be disappointed if she didn't win. "I didn't want that either," she added.

De la Torre and her family — parents Demetria and Jose, and brothers Samuel, 16, and Eric, 10 — are parishioners at St. Raphael Church in Springdale. Maritza, a 2010 graduate of Springdale High School, is completing her sophomore year at the University of Arkansas where she's a double major in international business (with a concentration in marketing and a minor in French) and political science. A legal U.S. resident, she hopes to become a U.S. citizen this summer along with her mother.

With such intense studies and a full schedule of other activities, de la Torre acknowledged time management is an important skill. Still, she was intrigued when a fellow UA student suggested she enter the beauty pageant. Turns out that student held the 2011 title and was planning to attend the March 3 event to relinquish her crown.

"My friend said, 'You should do it. You have nothing to lose,'" she said. "I didn't mind going to Little Rock (and thought I'd just) have some fun with it. I told my friend, 'OK, sign me up.'"

She did a pre-pageant interview in Springdale and a couple of training sessions.

"That's how I kind of got ready for it," de la Torre said.

Her parents weren't the only ones in the dark. "I didn't even tell my best friend," she said.

De la Torre did tell her parents she was going to Little Rock for the day to support "a friend" who was competing. Her parents weren't enthusiastic.

"They said, 'You should stay home and help with the dishes,'" she continued.

Ironically, de la Torre thinks her attitude may have helped her perform better in the competition.

"I guess that confidence was a plus or something," she laughed.

The Latina pageant is sponsored by a small but growing organization, de la Torre said. "We're trying to make it where it becomes a larger organization."

The competition doesn't have a talent section but the contestants must participate in several interviews and model different gown styles, including a cocktail dress.

"It wasn't a very long pageant — short and sweet. They had (planned) a party afterwards at the center where they held the (competition) and I was just looking forward to the party," de la Torre recalled. "I was starving."

When the winner was announced, "I was so surprised when they called my name. I couldn't believe it. I was just speechless," she said.

And, of course, her parents were home in Springdale.

"I called them and was kind of not crying but really excited at the moment. 'Mom! Mom! I won!'" Her mother was worried. "What? Are you OK?" She thought something bad had

happened to me," de la Torre said. "She didn't believe me until the next day when I got home

and she saw my crown and my flowers.”

As the state winner, de la Torre won a trip to the national pageant, scheduled for the first week in June in Cancun. De la Torre was born in Mexico and went to school there for several years but has never been to Cancun. She doesn't know if her parents will be in the audience then either as her father was already to visit Mexico in early May and may not be able to take time from his construction job for a second trip. Tickets are “somewhat pricey” and her mother is reluctant to go without her husband although de la Torre hopes she'll come. In any case, at least one friend will make the trip with de la Torre.

For this competition, she'll do a little more formal training, squeezing the extra work in somehow.

“It's going to be tough because I have finals the first week of May but usually school is not a big problem. ... I think I'll do OK.”