



Natalie Garcia is a Wood River High School cheerleader. Photo courtesy of Alondra Barajas

# NATALIE GARCIA

## *Putting a Smile On People's Faces*

BY JONATHAN KANE

Natalie Garcia, a senior at Wood River High School, enjoys putting a smile on people's faces so much so that this Advanced Placement psychology student decided to make it the focus of her personal project this year.

"What I love to do most is make people feel good," Garcia said. "For example, if a friend is upset with a family situation, I like to be with them and hang out with them and try to take their mind off the situation. Taking psychology in school has tied into this. I'm so interested in it and I never thought I'd learn so much about the brain."

Garcia says that making people happy also makes her happy.

"If I can put a smile on their faces, it proves that I did a great job."

Garcia's personal project, which she just finished, was more of a social experiment. The question she posed was: "What can a positive gesture do to someone's well-being?"

"I want to be a social worker and learn about people and I saw a video on someone who did this experiment, so I wanted to try it also. The people that were experimented on smiled and cried with so much happiness. At Wood River, we have bullying talks and suicide prevention and I decided I wanted to spread positive energy around the school and around town and make a difference."

The experiment was simple: Go around town and school and give a random person a compliment and a flower and record the reaction. Forty people were approached for the survey.

"It took a while to complete and at first I was very nervous to approach people because I'm pretty shy," Garcia said. "I had friends who volunteered and helped out by recording me and I would record them. One that was really memorable was at King's department store when I approached a woman getting into her car. I told her that she was beautiful and gave her a flower. She started laughing but told us how wonderful it made her feel and she was surprised because it had never happened before. Then she thanked me and wished me a happy holiday."

Garcia picked people she felt particularly drawn to.

"At King's, I told another woman how beautiful she was and how much she must be loved by the people in her life. She grabbed her chest and told us how happy that made her feel and thanked us."

"It was a good thing to do this time of year. For my presentation, I will do a PowerPoint with pictures and video and the testimonials of the people we approached. The amazing thing is how many of the people said they would pass on the gesture to other strangers."

"I learned that something small can have a big effect on someone's life and turn their day around. Everyone also remarked about how good it made them feel and that it was something that doesn't happen a lot."

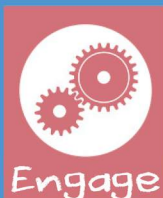
"I'm really happy I did the project. Spreading joy and making someone's day is infectious."

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