

# Passing the Passion

Ag science senior aims to  
teach & reach high schoolers

BY JO ANN LLOYD



Agricultural science senior Nicole Castle and John Rogers (Photo by Patrick Swadener)

**A**gricultural science senior and “Rogers Scholar” Frances “Nicole” Castle is passionate about agriculture.

“I knew at a very young age that I wanted to teach agriculture,” she said.

## IN 2002, SHE EARNED AN AMERICAN FFA DEGREE, THE HIGHEST DEGREE THE ORGANIZATION AWARDS.

Born and raised in the San Joaquin Valley – California’s top agricultural producing region – that’s not surprising.

Growing up, she was active in the FFA (Future Farmers of America). The organization both broadened her horizons and helped mold her character, she says.

“My FFA experiences shaped the person I am today,” Castle said. “My advisors were like family to me. They also changed the lives of many who might have been destined for failure. My advisors inspired me.”

The FFA is not the only organization

that changed Castle’s life. The Mary Stuart Rogers Foundation, and the scholarships it provides, has made her teaching goal attainable.

A second-year Rogers Scholar, Castle was among 27 Cal Poly students who received a Mary Stuart Rogers scholarship this year. “The scholarship puts me that much closer to becoming a teacher,” she says. “Without that help, I would not be able to attend a university like Cal Poly.”

And Cal Poly is lucky to have her, according to Robert A. Flores, professor and department head of the Agricultural Education and Communication Department. “We are fortunate that Nicole chose Cal Poly,” he says. “She’s delightful, and students recognize her as a leader. I have no doubt that she’ll become a sought-after teacher.”

Castle remains active in the FFA, last year devoting countless hours as a committee chair at the State FFA Judging Finals held on campus. In 2002, she earned an American FFA degree, the highest degree the organization awards. To qualify, she

completed three years of classroom instruction and worked on beef, sheep, swine, dairy cattle and horse projects.

Castle is on track to graduate in December and will then begin studies in Cal Poly’s teacher credential program.

The 22-year-old is looking forward to passing her passion for agriculture on to students. “I want to help them develop the skills that will benefit them throughout their lives, to help them build character and integrity. I can help them realize their potential.” ■

## MARY STUART ROGERS FOUNDATION HELPS STUDENTS WHO HELP OTHERS

BY CAROL PENDERGAST

*Be alert to give service. What counts in life is what we do for others. —Anonymous*

Few organizations have done as much to support students at Cal Poly as the Mary Stuart Rogers Foundation.

Since 2000, the family foundation has provided 125 annual scholarships to “Rogers Scholars,” outstanding Cal Poly students who demonstrate academic excellence, personal integrity, leadership and service. Preference is given to students studying to become teachers.

Based in Modesto, the foundation was established in 1985 by the late Mary Stuart Rogers, whose commitment to supporting education and human service organizations remains the focus of the organization today.

Under the leadership of John Rogers, who has directed the organization since his mother’s death in 1992, the Mary Stuart Rogers Foundation has become a vital presence in the San Joaquin Valley and at universities and colleges in California, Oregon and Washington.

The growth of the scholarship program over the past 15 years is a reflection of John Rogers’ belief that “the scholars truly embody the foundation’s purpose: building a better world through service, one person and one act at a time.”

Cal Poly celebrates the scholarship awards at an annual fall banquet. Enlivened by the personal involvement of John Rogers, other family members, and the compelling stories of past and present awardees, the event is a moving experience. “I don’t think there is another event like it,” says Laura Dimmitt, interim associate director of admissions, recruitment and financial aid. “Relationships are forged there.”

John Rogers gives a personal slant on the family’s support of the scholarship program and banquet: “It is very important to keep our family focused on what we should do with our resources. It gives the whole family a sense of giving back, a sense of service.” ■