

Eighth-graders create winning film on U.S. trade embargo

HIALEAH, Fla. – All they knew about the U.S. embargo on trade with Cuba is what they had heard from their parents and grandparents. They knew even less about filming a documentary.

Yet armed with the enthusiasm and “whatever” attitude of young teenagers, two eighth-graders from Immaculate Conception School in Hialeah managed to win the middle-school division of C-SPAN’s StudentCam competition by producing a documentary called “Embargo or Free Trade?”

The 10-minute documentary traces the nearly 50-year history of the U.S. economic embargo against Cuba, examines the positions of various presidential candidates toward the embargo and concludes with the opinions of individual Cubans and politicians from south Florida, among them the mayors of Hialeah and Hialeah Gardens.

The documentary was one of three first-prize winners selected from among 313 videos submitted nationwide.

“We put a lot of hard work into it and also when we interviewed different (state) representatives I think that gave it an extra touch,” Kristen Cuba, 13, told the Florida Catholic, newspaper of the Miami Archdiocese.

She and classmate Alexandria Segovia did not use a video camera to produce their documentary. They used a Sony Cybershot, a pocket-size digital camera that records videos.

“We learned a lot,” said 14-year-old Alexandria, who says she found out about the contest because her father “puts on C-SPAN every morning to wake me up.”

“She called me and asked if I wanted to do it and I said yes,” said Kristen. “I was already interested in journalism.”

They worked on the project over Christmas vacation. The contest theme was the primary election campaign.

“Florida is one of the most important states for the presidential election. We had to pick a topic that was related to the campaign,” said Alexandria, adding, “We’re Cuban. (The embargo) is important to us.”

Both sets of their parents support the embargo, as did everyone they spoke to in their video, except for some of the presidential candidates. Alexandria and Kristen said they support it, too, although they were only vaguely familiar with the issues when they embarked on the documentary.

“After the documentary we have a lot more interest in our affairs in Cuba and what’s going on, and a lot more sympathy toward our grandparents,” said Alexandria, both of whose parents were born in Cuba.

“My dad doesn’t remember anything about Cuba because he came when he was 4. My mom (who came at age 15) remembers being beat up going to school because her family was leaving the country,” she said.

Kristen’s mom was born in Cuba but came to the U.S. as a baby and her father was born in Miami to Cuban exiles.

“Now I’m more sure about it,” said Kristen of her support for the embargo. “My decision hasn’t been changed” now that Fidel Castro has ceded power to his brother, Raul.

“It can’t be hurting the people because the (Cuban) government is able to trade with other countries that are not the United States,” said Alexandria. The misery of the Cuban people “is not our fault at all. It’s basically the fault of the government in Cuba,” she said.

Both Kristen and Alexandria are somewhat experienced in politics: They serve as president and vice president, respectively, of their school’s student council.

When they are not studying or producing documentaries, the girls are active in school clubs and sports programs. Kristen also volunteers with the Catholic Impacto

movement for young families. Alexandria serves on the Hands on Miami youth volunteer council and took part in the Florida House of Representatives page program in March.

“Both Kristen and I are looking into journalism,” Alexandria said about their future careers. “Kristen would like to be an anchorwoman and I would like to do some writing and have some airtime, too, if I can.”

“Embargo or Free Trade?” will air Saturday, April 26, on C-SPAN (viewers should check local listings for airtimes). An interview with Kristen Cuba and Alexandria Segovia on C-SPAN’s “Washington Journal” will follow. The video can be viewed online at: www.youtube.com/user/aliiibabaa.