

PATHS/ Making choices

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he was introduced by the Mission Trails Regional Occupational Program, ROP.

He'll go to a special John Deere school in Walla Walla, Wash. Starting in January, Torres will attend three months of tractor school, return to Salinas for three months on the job at Pringle Tractor Co., return to Walla Walla, and so on for two years.

"Back and forth until I have those basic credentials," he said. "Then I'll work for John Deere or Pringle."

Accepted by the California Culinary Academy in July, Venter already has won a Future Chef of America scholarship for placing third in a cooking contest against nine competitors.

While so many graduates are stymied by career choice, Torres and Venter enjoy the certainty of knowing.

So does Francisco Pauda.

Graduating this year from Everett Alvarez High School, Pauda's bound for the University of California at San Diego to study aeronautical-mechanical engineering.

"My dad is ex-Air Force and a pilot, and I've always wanted to understand airplanes rather than just fly them," said Pauda, who will be getting his private pilot's license this summer.

He seeks to understand the workings of aircraft but also to design high speed planes.

Sept. 21 is his first day.

While at the school, Pauda will take time out for a semester or two to go to France. He'll study and work with an aircraft consortium run by France, Germany and the United Kingdom.

Just as Pauda's interest in the workings of aircraft comes from his father, Venter's interest in cooking began at home.

Born in South Africa, she grew up in a family that made its own foods — such as sausages and breads — from scratch.

Venter's 15-month, five-hours-a-day, Academy courses will cover basic cooking skills, cutting meats, running a restaurant, specialty cuisine and much more.

She, too, hopes to spend time in Europe, in Italy, to learn the local cuisine.

Torres also got an early, family-related start. By age 7, he was tinkering under the hood of his father's old Duster.

The John Deere opportunity brings Torres in touch with a global corporation, one interested in "growing their own employees," said Mark Neal, Torres' ROP instructor.

"I like hands-on work, and I'm always learning something new and there's always something new happening," Torres said of his chosen profession.

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