



By **Gerald Witt**  
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GREENSBORO — At 10 years old, Jessica Tran is skating as fast as girls who are three or five years older.

She's also performing spins and jumps that are ahead of the average figure skater of her age, enough to qualify her for the U.S. Junior Figure Skating Championships in Salt Lake City starting Dec. 15.

"She's very athletic," said her coach, Lance Travis, a former junior national pairs champion and senior national pairs bronze medalist. "You wouldn't guess she's 10."

The Thomasville girl trains at the Greensboro Ice House.

She qualified for the championships by finishing fourth of 24 skaters from across 10 states and the District of Columbia at the South Atlantic Regional Figure Skating Championships in Wake Forest in October.

Jessica is one of about 300 youth figure skaters in the Greensboro area, Travis estimated, and the youngest in the state to go to nationals.

"I was very proud, very happy," Jessica said when she placed high in regionals. "I work hard to reach my goal." Jessica has skills that can't be taught, Travis said. She is flexible, helpful for difficult Biellmann spins in which skaters grab one foot above and behind their heads while rotating.

And she has artistic ability. "I would say that she's one of the best" for her age, Travis said. "And she's one of the best that I've had come through the Ice House." Denise Williamson is a technical specialist from Davidson who will officiate at the U.S. Figure Skating Championships in Greensboro in January. She recently watched tape of Jessica at regionals.

"She's a very spunky skater," Williamson said, adding that she follows music better than most skaters of her age. "Usually they don't listen to the music well at that age," Williamson said.

Jessica skates with confidence and artistic flair, which must be reserved for the ice because she's a quiet child elsewhere. She's a fifth-grader at Friendship Elementary School in Winston-Salem.

Her favorite subject is math.

She also takes taekwondo, reads "Nancy Drew" books ("because it has a mystery you can solve before the book") and enjoys Chinese food. "Any kind of dish with noodles," she said over wire-rimmed glasses in the game room at the Ice House.

She wears a bracelet for physical strength — the rubberized kind that many pro athletes wear — and a gold rope necklace that her mother gave her. Not long ago, she dreamed she was in the Olympics. "There were people watching me live on TV," she said, adding that her skating heroes are 2010 U.S. champion Rachael Flatt and Olympian Mirai Nagasu. Her mother, Tu Nguyen, said that ahead of the championships, Jessica has had some jitters. "But we're working on that," she said.

Skating, for Jessica, is a process of setting and meeting goals. She's working on landing a double flip and mastering spins. She also wants to consistently hit a double axel, which Williamson said is needed for those at her level to place well in nationals.

"Mom usually says, 'Believe in yourself, you can do it,'" Jessica said. "She wants me to do my best."

