

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

ELBERT "ELBIE" CHIU, CLASS OF 1996

Elbert "Elbie" Chiu is an Austin pioneer in several ways. First, as an early graduate of Eanes ISD's special education program and again in his career at The University of Texas. In his father's words, Elbie's life is "so adventurous and rich," in large part thanks to the education he received in Eanes ISD. Elbie's sister, Minerva Chiu, and his niece, Irena Martinez, also graduated from WHS in 1982 and 2014, respectively.



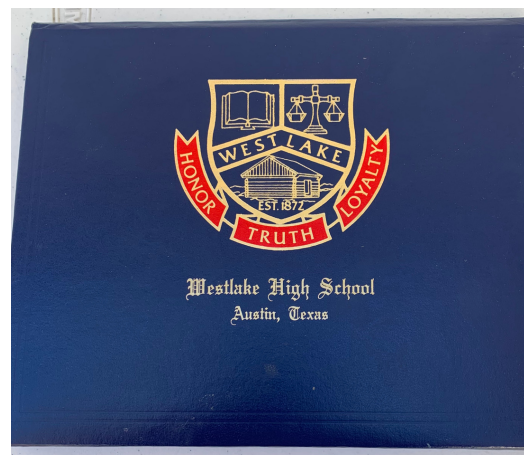
THE DISTRICT APPEAL

Elbie's family moved to Westlake from North Austin, because his mother, Ching, wanted a better special education program for Elbie alongside a high-quality education for his sister, Minerva. Ching met with the director for special education at the time, Ruth Haak, and came away impressed with the program and determined to place her son in the district.



THE EANES EXPERIENCE

Hill Country's teachers and special education classes helped Elbie immensely. He lives with Fragile X, a form of Autism, and the program enabled him to better navigate his educational and social life, both within his program and in the greater school environment. According to his father, everyone was willing to help Elbie and include him in daily activities. Elbie's own adventurous spirit allowed him to bravely venture into mainstream classes at Westlake, like typing. To this day, he still has friends from Eanes.



POST-SECONDARY PREPARATION

In the '90s, life after high school for people with Autism was shrouded in mystery. Eanes helped prepare Elbie and his family for independent, adult life. According to his parents, Elbie was tested for a variety of aptitudes and his special education teachers identified his gifts for working memory and document sorting. They placed him in the school mailroom for job training during school hours. He excelled at the work, even earning the "Most Outstanding Work Student" Academic Achievement Award while at WHS!



A professor of Physics at the University of Texas, his father, Dr. Charles Chiu wrote a software program to help teach Elbie how to sort mail, replicating the University's mailroom in their family home. After graduating from the EISD Special Education program at 23, Elbie was hired by the University of Texas department mailroom. As the University had no hiring program in place at the time for adults like Elbie, he had to prove his place in the program as a probationary hire for his first six months. His permanent hiring broke a new barrier for adults with intellectual or developmental disabilities in Texas. In 2013, Elbie was awarded the Certificate of Appreciation as part of the 2013 IPMA Mail Center of the Year Award.



PRESENT DAY

Now, Elbie lives independently in a group home near his family. In fact, he recently discovered that another resident of his group home was a fellow WHS student from his program. He works in the UT mailroom, for 23 years and counting, and still enjoys his job to this day



by Julie Lass & Irena Martinez