

Karate Black Belt Level 8, Life Scout, and TV producer among accomplishments achieved so far by student with Asperger syndrome

Winston School junior Tim Higgins is a Karate Black Belt Level 8, a Life Scout (one step before Eagle), and he produces television shows for Del Mar TV. He also scuba dives, and volunteers at the YMCA, as well as for the White Sea Bass Project. And he shares a passion for trains with his father, volunteering weekends as a docent cashier/tour guide for the San Diego Vintage Trolley.

Looking at him today, it would be hard to comprehend that before starting at the Winston School (www.thewinstonschool.com) in November 2010, he was a struggling student with Asperger Syndrome trying to make his way in classes with 40-plus students and bullies around every corner.

Even the previous school's "solutions" became problems, Higgins said. "They pull you out of the regular class to go to resource class, but classes wouldn't crossover. I'd get double the math work — 60 problems a night — that became even more difficult because I spent time in resource class during the traditional math class."

Higgins' mother, who is a special education advocate, attended the Winston School Conversation series featuring speaker Ed Asner and knew the school was a good fit for her son.

From that first day, Higgins liked the school. "It was enjoyable to come to Winston and see more traditional classrooms and functioning school grounds where everyone gets along. I didn't have to watch my back and wait for someone to attack me like at the previous school."

He said he has made many friends at Winston in the last year and appreciates the diversity of students. "I have a lot of friends. Everyone has groups of friends they hang out with in different environments. They sit in the auditorium, outside, have a game day pass where they can play video games, but that's not a priority for me as I don't play them. Here I can get along pretty much with everyone — at other schools the kids were getting into things they shouldn't — attitudes are off. You can connect with the people here — including the teachers.

"All the teachers have been influential," he said. "They've all influenced me in their own way, even teachers I haven't had. It's a community here so even if you don't have them they still talk to you, it's really nice."

Winston Headmaster Mike Peterson underscores his student's point, but says there's more to the story. "At Winston, it is the entire community that educates and not just inside the classroom. But this effect is greatly magnified when you have a student as



Tim Higgins

willing to engage, as curious and as observant as Tim. He's a remarkable young man."

One teacher he immediately connected with was Dan Peragine. Higgins had already discovered an interest in video production before his first day at Winston when he met the popular Winston teacher. Peragine recognized Higgins' talent and immersed his new student in the school's video program. Higgins' first project was editing the online video of the school's production of "Grease" and he has edited all the other productions since, including "Footloose" and the most recent production, "Wizard of Oz." He also produced videos for the school's talent shows, and middle and upper school bands.

Higgins' video work has also extended beyond the school.

"The Winston school has encouraged everything I wanted to do — I've gone from one tiny camera to a three-camera set up," he said. Through his work with Peragine, Higgins has also become a certified producer through The Del Mar Television Association. After taking a four-hour course and learning how to operate the equipment, he also started producing healthy family lifestyle training videos with a local chiropractor and recently completed a short video on the vintage trolley Silverline that runs in downtown San Diego on the weekends.

Higgins is also in the planning stages of producing a monthly segment for Del Mar TV called "Winston Windows" and he's working on another episode of "Healthy Family." He said this latest show will focus on healthy eating and recipes from the Paleo Diet, incorporating foods that are gathered or hunted — nuts, vegetables and meat.

A big part of his life since he was 5 has been karate. Currently ranked a level 8 junior black belt, he's planning to train for adult black belt next year. He is also a volunteer teacher at the YMCA. Boy Scouts has been another constant and he's in the pro-

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A champagne toast with Nuvi Mehta, Lorenzo Palomo, Audrey Geisel, Jessie Chang, and Pam Slater-Price. Photo/Susan DeMaggio

Unique premiere of 'The Sneetches' is Symphony tribute to Audrey Geisel

The San Diego Symphony honored Audrey Geisel for her long-time support of the arts at the West Coast premiere of "The Sneetches," a work for narrator and orchestra by Spanish composer Lorenzo Palomo, Jan. 17, at the Neurosciences Institute Auditorium.

The Sneetch story, by Geisel's husband, the late Dr. Seuss (Theodor Seuss Geisel), explores the folly of prejudice — some Sneetches have a green star on their bellies, and some of them don't — and the narrow-mindedness that results, inviting more foolishness.

The composition was commissioned for the Rochester (New York) Philharmonic by physician Sid Sobel, and will have its "official" premiere there in the spring of 2012.

Some 350 friends and associates attended the special event in La Jolla, which included a family-friendly reception and a performance by the Symphony's brass quintet followed by "The Sneetches" for two pianos (performed by Jessie Chang and Bryan Verhoye, with narration by Nuvi Mehta), and a post-concert Champagne toast.

Celebrity guests filled the audience, including Lorenzo Palomo, who attended the premiere along with North County's musical Romero family, Symphony board members, Symphony Music Director Jahja Ling (husband of pianist Jessie Chang), and Pam Slater Price, San Diego County Supervisor of District 3. Visit www.sandiegosymphony.org

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cess of finishing Life Scout before starting on his Eagle. Within the next six months, Winston School will benefit from his Eagle project when he plants a low-water garden filled with California natives, succulents and Mediterranean plants on the school yard. The project requires that he plan, fund-raise, hire workforce, buy materials, install and maintain the garden.

Next summer he will return to Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico, hopefully as a member of

the staff. He set the groundwork when he took two separate trips last summer and completed more than 100 miles of hiking. The first trip was for the National Advanced Youth Leadership Experience, the highest level youth and adult training in scouts. He and 100 other scouts also attend leadership training courses. Of the four courses, he has completed two.

Higgins also has a love for the water. He has been scuba diving since 2008 and has completed all the major courses through advanced open and rescue diver. He would also like to get more

involved with the White Sea Bass Project, which works to restore the bass by raising them in a slip and releasing them into the bay. "I've only fed the fish once, but I hope to go back again soon," he said. "The project is working as the bass are now caught as far up as Santa Barbara now and the population is increasing."

When thinking about a college major or a career, Higgins said he has been searching and trying to decide.

"I like English and science and am considering careers in video, oceanography, computers, and business."



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