

Rising to the Occasion –

Houston CPA Finds Fulfillment Volunteering for Special Needs School

Just about every Friday, small eager faces peer into an office at The Rise School of Houston. After all, what kid doesn't want to say "hi" to their CPA?

"All our 58 children know 'Mr. Brad' and many want to see him the day he comes in," laughs Director **Jan Stailey**. She's talking about **Brad Elgin**, CPA-Houston, a seven-year volunteer for an amazing school that provides early childhood education primarily for children with disabilities and developmental delays.

Elgin, now an internal auditor at ExpressJet Airlines, first learned of The Rise School back when he was with Deloitte and was assigned the audit for the not-for-profit in the fall of 2002.

"It looked like a fairly small, simple job," recalls Elgin. "But as I sat in a conference room listening to the children sing as they walked from class to class . . . I found myself thinking how this school could really use some help. Not with education issues – they know a great deal about early childhood development. But accounting? Not so much."

In fact, Elgin said that he couldn't stop remembering how nice everybody was at Rise, how they were the "greatest people." So the following spring after the audit report was issued, he decided to call and offer his services on a *pro bono* basis. Once Elgin got the school's accounting systems "cleaned up and on track," he proceeded to get involved with many other aspects of the school.

Stailey says: "In addition to helping with financial reports and any CPA fine tuning that we need, Brad truly gives of himself. All of our events, he helps us with those. He helps us set up for fun runs, handles the accounting issues with silent auctions. He just gives 100 percent."

Childhood Heroes

Despite the impact that the movie *Star Wars* had on Elgin when he was in second grade, he didn't grow up intending to be a hero. In fact, his earliest ambition was to be a rock star, although he never quite figured out how that was going to work out for someone who played the clarinet and couldn't sing. As he grew up in Toledo, Ohio, practicality began to set in, and young Elgin decided that law looked like a more promising career . . . but that too would change thanks to family tradition.



Brad Elgin, CPA-Houston.

"My grandfather was a Deputy Tax Commissioner for the City of Toledo where my grandmother also worked as an auditor," explains Elgin. "And they did some bookkeeping and tax work on their own. But I think a lot of my decision to study accounting had to do with my Uncle Jim. He worked for the Treasury Department and, I don't know all the details, but I remember my grandmother telling stories of him being involved with

joint task forces that investigated organized crime – tax evasion and money laundering. We only saw him about once a year, but I remember him being very intelligent and organized and somewhat reserved, and I admired him. I saw the respect that my parents and grandparents had for him and it kind of rubbed off on me. I wanted to emulate him . . . and I was good at math."

Although Elgin was not destined to become the next Eliot Ness in the family, he did get his associate degree in accounting at the University of Toledo, home of the Mud Hens and Tony Packo's, both made a little famous by Jamie Farr's role as Clinger on *M.A.S.H.* At that point, much of his family had migrated to coastal south Texas, so Elgin decided to complete his university accounting education at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi.

"I never thought I would want to move someplace nice and warm all the time," smiles Elgin, who admits that he still misses the Midwest's change of seasons.

It was at A&M where Elgin says he began to really get into "the whole college experience" and where he was first inspired by the concept of professional volunteerism and involvement. He credits two of his college professors for whom he worked as an intern, **Dr. Janet Tillingier**, CPA-Corpus Christi, and **Paul Cameron**, CPA-Corpus Christi.

"Mr. Cameron especially was very outspoken about the profession and very involved with TSCPA," recalls Elgin. "He was the faculty advisor for our Accounting Society, and I became the vice-president in the spring of 1998 and took over as president during my final year. Actually, as officers of the A&M Accounting Society, we attended the monthly meetings of the Corpus Christi Chapter. In the end,

I finished up with a BBA, double majoring in Accounting and Management Information Systems (MIS)."

Upon graduation, Elgin joined the Deloitte & Touche Assurance & Advisory Services Group in Houston. In 2003, he joined local firm Linn, Thurber, Arnold & Skrabanek and began his volunteer work with The Rise School. A year later, he accepted a position in the Internal Audit Department of Continental Airlines. Then in November 2006, Elgin took a position with the Internal Audit Department at ExpressJet Airlines, where shortly he was promoted to manager and remains in that role today.

He also remains active in TSCPA, currently serving as a Houston Chapter representative on the board of directors. In addition, he is a member of the Houston board, chair of the Community Service Committee and vice-chair of the Membership Development Committee.

Elgin says: "Being an active member of the Society has taught me a lot about leadership. Not just in identifying my strengths and weaknesses, but also allowing me to learn from others. To me, leadership is not just motivating or delegating and achieving results from others. It has a lot to do with setting a positive example."

On the Home Front

Elgin says there's "not much to tell" about his home life. He's single, although admits to thoughts of settling down and having a family. For now, "family" in the historic Heights neighborhood of Houston consists of a 55-pound lab mix named Belle who Elgin cannot keep in the yard.

"There are two dogs over there and Belle gets bored when I'm not around," grimaces Elgin sheepishly. "So she jumps the fence."

Elgin's employment in the airline industry affords him a number of opportunities to travel; his favorite destination remains Paris. Every year, he meets a group of friends at Lobsterfest in Rockland, Maine, and he also enjoys camping. Elgin says when he's not working on the house, he dabbles in ceramics from time to time and is a movie buff. But he reiterates that The Rise School is his biggest involvement outside of what he does with the Society.

"It is just such a loving environment," he muses. "Remarkable what the teachers are able to accomplish. It's a family. You see parents helping other parents; there is always somebody to help with a need. The place never ceases to amaze me."

This year, Elgin was the keynote speaker at The Rise School graduation in July, and he felt quite "touched" to be asked. "I've been there since some of the graduates were in the baby room — six months to a year old. To see the changes since they've been in the school . . . from shy and withdrawn and maybe having difficulty speaking to ready for mainstream kindergarten. It's really something. I thank them for allowing me to be a part of it."

Director Stailey is thankful as well: "Brad Elgin is a Volunteer Extraordinaire. We are so blessed and grateful to have his expertise and his wonderful attitude about life that he shares with The Rise School. I can't say enough about him. He's a great, great person."

Elgin brushes aside any praise. "I actually feel selfish sometimes going in there; they make me feel so good. I always want to be that person who is the first to throw their hat in the ring and say, 'Yes, I'll help.' My greatest joy in life is what I do at that school." ❁

Society Creates Video Highlighting Benefits of an Accounting Career

TSCPA has created a new video that features interviews with several TSCPA members discussing the benefits they've found in a career in accounting. The short video highlights how Texas CPAs come from diverse backgrounds and that studying accounting offers a variety of career options.

Be sure to encourage any accounting students you know to watch the video and consider joining TSCPA as a student member. The video is located in the Student Section of the website at tscpa.org/Content/Students/CareerInAcct.aspx. For more information about accounting careers, students can also visit TSCPA's Destination CPA site at <http://go.tscpa.org>. To learn more about membership opportunities for students and candidates, go to the Student Section of the website at tscpa.org.

TAKE NOTE

TSCPA's 2010 Fall Recruitment Campaign

This year's fall recruitment campaign begins in mid-September and will run until December 31. The theme for the campaign is TSCPA: Your Renewable Resource, and will feature CPAs who have had their careers and professional lives renewed through the benefit of Society membership. Each prospective member will receive a reusable grocery tote, and fun prize drawings will be included for members who recruit others to join.

There are also chapter challenges taking place during the campaign. Contact your chapter to see how you can assist in those recruiting efforts.

TSCPA will send out additional information about the fall campaign in the weeks ahead. To learn more, please visit tscpa.org or contact Melinda Bentley at mbentley@tscpa.net, 800-428-0272, ext. 279 or 972-687-8579 in Dallas.

TSCPA Membership Renewal for 2010-2011

Don't let your TSCPA membership lapse! If you haven't already done so, now is the time to renew for 2010-2011. You can go online at tscpa.org or use the statement that was mailed to you.

For questions, please contact TSCPA's Rosa Castillo (rcastillo@tscpa.net, 800-428-0272, ext. 260, 972-687-8560 in Dallas) or Georgiana Anwuzia (ganwuzia@tscpa.net, 800-428-0272, ext. 271, 972-687-8571 in Dallas). Renew today!