



END OF AN APPI-ERA

Chemistry teacher Steven Appier reflects on the past 29 years at East

pending his retirement this May board] all year.”

AFTER EIGHT ROUNDS of math and science-related questions, the announcers began awards. Third place... second place... first-

Before the winners were even announced, the Nobel Gases shot up from their seats and roared with pride as Chemistry teacher Steven Appier triumphantly held a McDonald's fry up in the air.

They had just become the 2023 Trivia Night champions.

Some of the team members ate McDonald's before the competition and one fry was accidentally left on the table.

“Someone said ‘Oh my god! We have to save that fry. It's our good luck fry,’” Appier said. “Nina Yun wrapped it up in paper and it's been sitting [on the bulletin

“I hope that my time here has meant something. And that I've given something back to the East community because I've gained a lot by being here,” Appier said.

Chemistry teacher Jerrod Bardwell says the academic rigor of the chemistry department is one of a kind — thanks to Appier. Appier gets students involved in chemistry with constant after-school help and quirky activities like Mole Day — a celebration where AP Chem 2 students run around in mole costumes and Chemistry 1

students scream-arguing over a game of Whack-A-Mole

“This chemistry program here, you don't find that everywhere you go,” Bardwell said. “[People] probably don't realize what a big deal this program is here. [Appier] built that.”

Twenty-five years ago, after making fun of the AP Calculus chant students recite before every test, one of the AP Chemistry 2 students decided to collaborate with Appier on an original chant for his class.

Now, at the beginning of each year, Appier passes out a green sheet of paper with the chant — requiring all of his AP Chem 2 students to memorize and recite it in the halls while banging on the lockers before every test.

“Redox, acids, bases rule, chemistry is SUPER COOL!!”

“We love doing the chant,” AP Chem 2 student and junior Kelsey Stroud said. “It really helps you get your anxiety out before a test, and [Appier] gets really hype for it.”

Between lectures during lunch, pancake breakfasts in Appier's room on Friday mornings and an intense amount of homework, AP Chem 2 takes up a lot of free time, according to Stroud.

“Even though it's the hardest class I've ever taken, he makes it enjoyable for all the students because he cares about the concepts that he's teaching and makes it really engaging,” former AP Chem 2 student, former cadet teacher for Appier and senior Autumn Sun said.

One Wednesday morning last year, senior and AP Chem 2 student Anna Thelen went into Appier's room to ask a question about a test later that day, with a glazed

donut in hand. After a classic sarcastic remark from Appier asking where *his* donut was, Thelen now steals a donut from her Student Council meeting and delivers it to him every Wednesday morning.

Although Thelen doesn't have Appier as a teacher this year, she still visits daily, along with Stroud and Chemistry 1 students. Appier's desk after school has become a space where everything from empirical formulas to weekend gossip can be discussed — and he's always armed with a funny comment or sarcastic advice.

“His room is always so packed,” Thelen said. “Chemistry is maybe the hardest subject to learn and you can tell that the kids rely on Appier to further their understanding after school. I feel like he has the environment where you can come in, and he might poke fun at you a little bit, but he will actually answer your questions.”

Appier doesn't joke around with just his most advanced students — his charisma is extended to people all over the school, including the friends he's made outside the science department.

During third hour when Appier hears special education student and senior Patrick Schaff coming down the hall with the coffee cart, he turns his back to the door, shuts his computer and waits for Schaff to come up behind him and scare him. Though Appier typically pretends to be shocked, on days when he isn't paying attention, Schaff can him jump out of his seat.

“[He does scare me] from time to time,” Appier said. “And then I have to be careful because if I have my MacBook open, he'll try and change the settings [on it].”

After getting a cup of coffee and a fist bump from Schaff, Appier chuckles and calls Schaff a wizard every time he switches the background on his computer.

Last year when junior Kelsey Stroud had to go in after school to do the pipette demonstration lab for Chemistry 1, Appier comforted her as she cried over her inability to use the tool to measure an accurate amount of solvent. His students learn early in the year that when they say something self-degrading, Appier responds with “Don't talk about my students like that” which immediately calms their self-doubt.

Although he can be strict when it comes to learning, if a student is putting in the effort he jumps at the opportunity to help.

“At the beginning of this year I was struggling to take tests and I would take a long time [to finish it],” Stroud said. “I remember I was the last one there doing it and he was like ‘Hey, take your time, just stay here until you finish.’ And that meant

so much to me.”

He brought the idea of a professional learning community from a school he taught at in California. The chemistry department was the first to adopt this idea where the teachers have similar teaching styles and follow the same schedule, making the experience with different teachers as similar as possible so a specific teacher doesn't make-or-break a student's year. The chemistry PLC consists of Appier, Bardwell and Honors Chemistry teacher Susan Hallstrom.

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STEVEN APPIER
TEACHER

“What we were able to do with Bardwell and Hallstrom is maintain a level of rigor and keep our program at the level that it was since it's a constant battle for us,” Appier said. “And it's nice to have the two of them there on the same page.”

Appier knows that every time he hears footsteps coming out of the shared office between his and Hallstrom's classrooms something is up. Hallstrom will walk to his desk and start venting about her newest Mole Day-related issue or will ask him to go golfing with her.

In classic Appier fashion, every time Hallstrom walks in during a class, he's quick to joke and say “Nobody look but there's a homeless person standing behind me” or if a student asks him where Hallstrom is he replies with “She's probably sifting through the trash can, she'll eat anything.”

“[Teaching in this] department, we spend a lot of our lives here in this building working with kids,” Hallstrom said. “It'd probably be too much for me if we didn't have the camaraderie that lets us do a little friendly teasing and friendly competition to find some joy in our jobs.”

Bardwell and Appier have an equally close relationship — spending their weekends doing kayak races together and taking the occasional lake trip.

According to Appier, the interactions between the teachers serve the purpose of eliminating some of the fear that comes with learning a subject like chemistry with ionic nomenclature and buffer calculations.

“Chemistry is a very intimidating class,” Appier said. “And if it's funny and if they enjoy the class, then they don't notice as much how hard it is.”

Last year, during the Unit 3 exam in AP Chem 2, Sun didn't know what “Account for each of the following observations” meant. She resorted to listing the answer without any background or evidence — causing Appier to create a key with certain question words made just for Sun.

“I just misread a lot of things,” Sun said. “He would point it out in front of the whole class and be like ‘And for Autumn make sure you read this. Make sure you know this.’”

Although some might see this as being taunting, Sun was able to dish it right back to Appier, telling him he's supposed to be teaching her these things.

Because of the challenge that comes with learning chemistry and the heavy workload, Appier will get angry emails from other teachers complaining about students doing chemistry homework in their classes. Amid pressures from the administration to lighten the workload, Appier sees the students' commitment to his class as a sign of the strength of the program.

“There are teachers who would kill to be in a program like this,” Bardwell said. “Much less to build it.”

Appier has made sure to continue teaching equilibrium and thermodynamics, even as other Shawnee Mission High Schools begin to water down the curriculum. Still, he notes that the Honors Chemistry curriculum today is the same as what the regular chemistry curriculum was 10 years ago and wishes that would change.

Even though students drop his classes, he's always proud to see former students succeeding — getting their Ph.D. at Yale in environmental studies or continuing Einstein's work of disproving Quantum Mechanics.

“I believe that the people that will be most happy to see me go are the counselors,” Appier said. “Because the counselors are having to do extra work because of [the amount of students] that drop chemistry.”

As far as replacing Appier goes, Bardwell, Hallstrom and students express nervousness that the new teacher won't have the same level of experience and skill.

“I think that East is losing a very important teacher,” Sun said. “He's one of the core pieces of the science department and I think that [they're] going to have a tough time to recover after he's not there to teach AP Chem [2] anymore.”

IN HIS ELEMENT

Some of Appier's recent teaching moments in his current Chemistry classes



ABOVE Appier tosses Hallstrom a roll of red label tape in the middle of talking through the homework answers from the day before.

photo by **addie moore**



ABOVE Appier helps sophomore Kate Lucas light a Bunsen Burner during a Chemistry 1 lab.

photo by **addie moore**



ABOVE Appier is shocked how loud the sound of him slapping the yardstick against his desk.

photo by **addie moore**

Learn about what classes Appier has taught, his favorite experiments to run and what his former students are doing now

MR. SCIENCE

CLASSES

- AP CHEMISTRY 2
- BIOLOGY
- PHYSICAL SCIENCE
- METEOROLOGY

EXPERIMENTS

- TITRATIONS
- SPECTROSCOPIES
- REACTION LABS
- ISOTOPE STUDIES

STUDENTS

- GETTING PHD AT YALE
- IN DISEASE RESEARCH AND SUSTAINABILITY
- STUDYING QUANTUM MECHANICS