

Buffalo Grove welcomes airman home

BY TAYLOR GOLDENSTEIN

Contributor

Ben Rosengarden is used to working behind-the-scenes to keep a show running smoothly, be it at the Buffalo Grove Park District theater or in Shindand, Afghanistan.

Rosengarden, a former Buffalo Grove resident who spent his childhood helping with lights and sound at the theater, has served in Afghanistan for the past six months as a member of the security forces of the U.S. Air Force.

When he returned to Buffalo Grove Thursday evening, the senior airman was greeted by the Buffalo Grove and Wheeling police and fire departments, as well as the Patriot Guard Riders motorcyclists. Rosengarden was then escorted, motorcade and all, to the Village Bar and Grill, where a group of Buffalo Grove residents held a reception for him.

"It was one of the coolest things that ever got done for me," Rosengarden said. "I had an ear-to-ear smile the entire way."

Steve Walanka, a close friend of the family, helped organize the procession. Walanka was a close friend of Rosengarden's father, the late Scott, with whom he directed and produced theatrical productions in Buffalo Grove and Wheeling.

"We were the trio — Ben, Scott and I," he said. "I wanted to do this for him. He's a good kid who has finally found his way."

Walanka, who is a legislative aide to State Rep. Carol Sente, D-59th, invited Sente as well as U.S. Rep. Bob Dold, R-10th, who both spoke at Thursday's reception.

"(Rosengarden) is somebody that is a shining example of what our armed forces are doing for us to keep America free and safe," Dold said. "We can't thank (him) enough for his service, for what (he) represents for the armed forces and locally, here in Buffalo Grove."

Sente presented Rosengarden with a certificate of gratitude to "say thank you for everything, so we can live the lives that we have," she said.



Cheryl Giddens, right, shows photos of Ben Rosengarden's return home to Sally Nowak. Rosengarden returned to Buffalo Grove Thursday from a six-month deployment in Afghanistan. | ROB DICKER-SUN-TIMES MEDIA

Rosengarden decided to enter the military about three years ago after attending Harper College for law enforcement for two years. He volunteered for deployment in 2010. He spent the years leading up to his June 2011 deployment training at a base in Minnesota.

"At first, it was a culture shock — beyond a culture shock — but you just roll with the punches," he said. "Everything else was easy in a sense; it's 90 percent boredom and 10 percent sheer terror, and you just work through it."

Before his deployment, Rosengarden was about to start testing for the Buffalo Grove Police Department. In the past, he had volunteered with the department, doing periodic reviews of licensed establishments for underage liquor purchase and consumption.

Rosengarden plans to continue his education at Harper College until he can apply to a four-year college. Once he finishes school, he plans to test and interview for departments, listing



Buffalo Grove firefighters stand at attention as Senior Airman Ben Rosengarden's motorcade arrives Thursday in Buffalo Grove. |

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Buffalo Grove's as one of his top choices.

Sally Nowak, another close friend of Rosengarden and his father, coordinated

Thursday's homecoming reception at the restaurant, where they had held a farewell send-off six months earlier, when he departed.

Nowak met the Rosengardens through the Buffalo Grove theater, as well, where she worked as a stage manager.

"And I never left, even though my daughter grew up and Ben grew up and all the kids grew