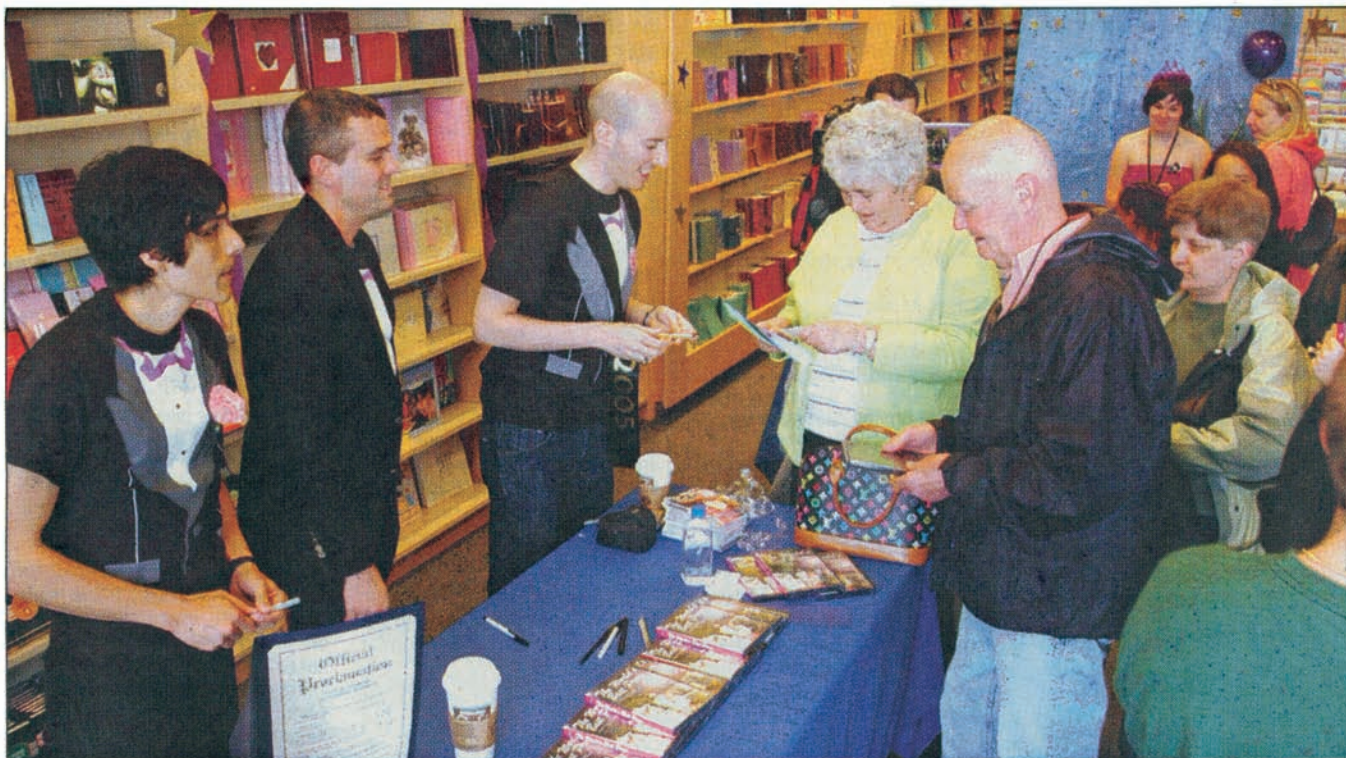




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Photos by MARK HERTZBERG *Journal Times*

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Ruben Carbajal, left, Chris Talbott and Ian Rosenberg, producers of "The World's Best Prom" documentary about the annual Racine Rotary Post Prom, wear tuxedo-themed T-shirts to sign copies of the DVD Saturday at Barnes & Noble Booksellers, 2710 S. Green Bay Road, Mount Pleasant. At the center of the photo, Rosenberg tells Linda Bixler that she was his favorite English teacher at Park High School, which each of the filmmakers attended.

'World's Best Prom:' Gritty and sweet

BY LEE B. ROBERTS
Journal Times

Sometimes you have to leave home to truly appreciate what you've left behind. Such revelations are what prompted a few former Racinians and some of their New York friends and co-workers to make a film about one of Racine's unique treasures, the Rotary Post Prom celebration.

When Park High School graduates Chris Talbott, Ian Rosenberg, Ruben Carbajal and Karen Sorensen went East and described Racine's annual prom extravaganza to out-of-towners, the reactions of amazement and disbelief they received made them realize that Post Prom was something out of the ordinary. Together, they and the rest of OVO (an artistic cooperative in New York) decided the city's big

REVIEW



MARK HERTZBERG *Journal Times*

Store staff members wore prom clothes and sashes, as if they were in a prom court, at Saturday's signing event.

lakefront party was worth documenting; six years later, the result is "The World's Best Prom," a film that had its first official Racine-area screenings Friday and Saturday nights at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside's Union Cinema.

This film is a not a slick, pasteurized view of high school life in Racine. At times gritty and at other times sweet, it follows three very different high school seniors (Tonya Witherspoon, Ben Adrian and Dori Sorensen) through their experiences at the 2000 citywide prom. From their earliest thoughts leading up to the evening through each step of their preparations — and onto

their limo rides, stroll down the red carpet, time on the dance floor and beyond — the teens let viewers inside their, and their families,' lives.

Excitement, disappointment, love, laughter, embarrassment and fun — it's all there on the big screen. And while its honesty may make you squirm a little at times, the film will bring a smile to your face more often than not. It might even teach you something about the city you live in — its history, its culture and its people.

Along with its documentation of recent prom celebrations, "The World's Best Prom" includes quite a bit of archival footage of

proms past, as well as other city life, from as far back as the 1950s. These early film clips, courtesy of the Racine Heritage Museum and local residents, show that this city's teenagers have known how to party for some time.

Did you know, for instance, that the Rotary's very first Post Prom celebrations featured entertainers including Count Basie, Stan Kenton and Tommy Dorsey? And some promgoers really did arrive Downtown on an elephant, before organizers set limits on the types of "vehicles" that could be used for the parade.

The filmmakers do a good job of tying the historical footage to more recent events through the

use of interviews with people who attended Post Prom in its earlier years — some of whom married their prom dates and are still involved with it here today as chaperones. Chances are, if you've lived here for a while, you'll recognize someone in the film. And even if you don't, you'll be familiar with the surroundings, both present and past — and you'll get the inside jokes.

While its main focus is prom night, "The World's Best Prom" reaches beyond that one evening to give viewers insight into the wider world of life in Racine as a teenager. It also provides follow

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PROM DVD

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up with each of its stars after the big night, telling us where they've gone and what they've done since graduation.

For those who've been to Post Prom in Racine, "The World's Best Prom" is a chance to relive those crazy, youthful years. For those who've never been, it's an opportunity to see what makes hundreds of people line up along the bleachers outside Festival Hall each May to experience the pageantry and mysticism that is the Rotary Post Prom.

Prior to its coming home for the recent screenings, "The World's Best Prom" was shown in New York City and has been featured on "This American Life," "ABC News Now" and in Entertainment Weekly — and that's just some of the national attention the film has received.

The audience Friday night at Parkside — which included local celebrities ranging from several of the film's stars to Racine Mayor Gary Becker — gave the film a standing ovation. And

HOW TO GET THE DVD

For more information about "The World's Best Prom" and its filmmakers, visit <http://www.worldsbestprom.com>

DVDs are being distributed nationwide and are available for sale in Racine at the Barnes & Noble Booksellers, 2710 S. Green Bay Road, as well as on the Web site. Cost on the Web site is \$19.98, which includes tax and shipping.

afterward, Becker presented the filmmakers with a proclamation, naming May 12-14 "World's Best Prom Week," along with a set of official Racine on the Lake Office of the Mayor hats.

Talbott, Rosenberg and Carbal were on hand at the screenings to answer questions. They also plan to attend Post Prom this weekend and shoot some film, which will eventually be posted on their Web site.