

Local native to march in inaugural parade



THE
EVENING
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Heading for Washington - Herkimer native Lt. Robert "Bo" Vespi, Jr. will march with his Coast Guard unit in Tuesday's inauguration parade in Washington, D.C.

By Lorraine Heath
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Washington D.C. -

While everyone in the valley will be watching the inauguration of Barack Obama, the 44th president on TV, a Herkimer native will have the experience of a lifetime: He will march in the parade to the White House.

Lt. Robert "Bo" Vespi Jr., a 1988 graduate of Herkimer High School, now serving with U.S. Coast Guard Port Security, USCG Reserves of Port Clinton, Ohio, just returned home from a tour of duty at the Port of Kuwait Dec. 19, and had very little time to be with his family when the honor was bestowed upon his unit.

"This is a once in a lifetime honor," Vespi said via his cell phone enroute by bus to Washington. Vespi's unit is the only Coast Guard unit selected, he said.

Vespi, who now resides with his wife, Tina, and four sons in Pemberville, Ohio, had planned on making the trip to Washington with his family in tow, but an unfortunate accident prevented the family trip of a lifetime. His wife recently fell and broke her ankle, putting a halt to the plans.

"My sons still think it's really cool I am in the parade," Vespi said.

Inauguration 2009 is slated to be one to remember. Obama will take the oath of office on the steps of the Capitol Building using the Bible used by Abraham Lincoln in 1861. Among the bigger events is the annual inaugural ball held in the evening. Vespi said his unit has been invited to the ball, but he will not be attending, he said.

"If my wife was coming with me, then for sure we would have gone, but without her, well, you can't go to the ball stag," Vespi said.

After Vespi graduated from Herkimer High, he said he attended college for a couple years until

entering the Air Force. In 2000, he transferred to the Coast Guard and was sent to the Port of Kuwait for “seven months and two days, but who’s counting,” he said.

When asked if he voted for the first African-American president, Vespi said he didn’t have the opportunity to vote in November’s election due to his deployment overseas.

“I think that he [Obama] will do well, though,” he said of his soon-to-be commander in chief.

Vespi’s father and stepmother, Robert and Peg Vespi of Little Falls, were also planning on heading to Washington to witness history in the making, but due to the weather and the anticipated large crowds, gave their tickets to Bob Sr.’s daughter and granddaughter. But that is not going to stop the proud father from watching television on Tuesday.

“We are extremely proud of him and we will be watching it on TV as well as taping it,” his dad said. “I want to be able to catch him in slow motion.” The senior Vespi also said this will be a once in a lifetime event for his son.

“I believe he said he was going to be in the front row, so he will be easy to catch a glimpse of. He is tall and an officer, so we should be able to pick him out,” Bob Sr. said.

When asked to sum up his impending experience of being a part of history, Vespi Jr. said, “This will be the highlight of my military career for sure.”