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PART OF HISTORY

Naperville
residents among
thousands
celebrating
Obama win
in Grant Park

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John J. Kim / Chicago Sun-Times

President-elect Barack Obama waves to supporters during the election night rally Tuesday. The event was an unforgettable experience for several Naperville residents in the crowd.



Jonathan Miano / Staff photographer

Barack Obama supporters cheer after CNN declares his victory at the Obama victory rally Tuesday night in Grant Park.

'Any dream is possible'

Naperville residents share historic Obama moment

By Laura Hawbaker
Special to The Sun

Residents from Naperville and neighboring towns shared a moment in American history on election night when they joined an estimated 200,000 people in Chicago's Grant Park to celebrate Barack Obama's victory in the U.S. presidential election.

Some 65,000 ticketed guests packed into lower Hutchinson Field to attend the rally. Tens of thousands more celebrated outside on the streets of the Loop and in greater Grant Park.

They wore homemade T-shirts and Obama pins. They

cheered together during Obama's speech, and some shared tears. The crowd sang along to "Sweet Home Chicago," Kanye West's "Touch the Sky" and India Arie's "There's a Hope." They chanted, "Yes we can," and later, "Yes we did!"

Campaign volunteer

Among those in the crowd was Matthew Vrba, 32, a systems engineer at Tel-labs in Naperville and an Obama campaign volunteer. Obama's campaign deployed an unprecedented network of volunteers who called potential voters, participated in door-to-door canvassing and registered people to vote.

Vrba spent the last year and a half volunteering for the campaign, which began for him during the Democratic primaries at the 2007 Iowa caucuses, where Obama's presidential run first gained momentum. He lived in Naperville until he moved to Chicago four years ago.

"If he didn't win in Iowa, people weren't going to listen to him," Vrba recalls. "When we heard him declared the winner over the radio, it was overwhelming. We listened to the speech, stayed up late, had a bottle of champagne."

For Vrba, the scene in Grant Park echoed that night in Iowa nearly two years ago.

"When they announced Obama had won Ohio, I popped some champagne," he said. "Then, the crowd started doing the countdown to California. When they announced it, I kissed my fiancée and hugged everybody around me. People were going nuts."

Younger generation

In addition to volunteers, Obama's campaign mobilized a younger generation, and thousands of students and first-time voters flooded Grant Park. Among them were Caroline Rowland of Naperville and Amanda Dominguez of

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Excerpts from Barack Obama's historic acceptance speech Tuesday in Grant Park:

"At this defining moment change has come to America."

"Even as we celebrate tonight, we know the challenges that tomorrow will bring are the greatest of our lifetime — two wars, a planet in peril, the worst financial crisis in a century."

"The road ahead will be long. Our climb will be steep. We may not get there in one year or even in one term. But, America, I have never been more hopeful than I am tonight that we will get there."

"I will always be honest with you about the challenges we face. I will listen to you, especially when we disagree."

"This victory alone is not the change we seek. It is only the chance for us to make that change."

"In this country, we rise or fall as one nation, as one people. Let's resist the temptation to fall back on the same partisanship and pettiness and immaturity that has poisoned our politics for so long."

"As Lincoln said to a nation far more divided than

ours, we are not enemies but friends. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection."

"And to those Americans whose support I have yet to earn, I may not have won your vote tonight, but I hear your voices. I need your help. And I will be your president, too."

"To those who would tear the world down: We will defeat you. To those who seek peace and security: We support you. And to all those who have wondered if America's beacon still burns as bright: Tonight we proved once more that the true strength of our nation comes not from the might of our arms or the scale of our wealth, but from the enduring power of our ideals: democracy, liberty, opportunity and unyielding hope."

"That's the true genius of America: that America can change. Our union can be perfected. What we've already achieved gives us hope for what we can and must achieve tomorrow."

Source: CNN



OBAMA

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Downers Grove.

Rowland, a broadcast journalism major at Columbia College, waited in line at 6 a.m. to vote, then traveled into the city to cover the election for a college-wide broadcast on WYCC, a public television station that airs on Channel 20.

"The energy in Chicago tonight is ridiculous," Rowland said at the rally. "They've shut down the whole city for this event — canceled classes, closed down most of the south Loop. It's insane!"

Rowland, 23, who originally supported Hillary Clinton, is impressed by the change she has seen in her peers. "Before the election, we were so celebrity focused. Now it's switched. Now we're looking at the issues."

First-time voter

Dominguez, 20, a political science major at Naperville's North Central College, shares Rowland's viewpoint. This year was her first time voting, and her parents accompanied her to the polling place.

"My parents were really excited for me," she said. "My

whole life I've been raised to know about my government and know the importance of being a part of my country."

Dominguez attended the rally with a professor and two other students from her model U.N. class.

"This is something that's going in the history books," she said. "I'm going to be able to tell my children I was there. I witnessed a huge turning point in American history."

On the eve of the election, before the crowds swarmed the city and before Obama was named the nation's 44th president, Bob Hudson, 50, a computer contractor from Naperville, staked out the empty, pristine rally site.

"I would never in my lifetime have believed that this day would come," Hudson said Monday. Hudson's father bought a home in Evanston under a contract that said African-Americans couldn't hold property. His wife, Ella, grew up in segregated Alabama, where she had to sit in the back of cafés.

Now, the nation has elected an African-American man as president.

"It makes me feel anything is possible," he said. "Any dream is possible for anyone." Comment at newsroom.com

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