

Ryan Smithson

Class of 2003

Columbia High School

Mr. Ryan Smithson is currently a full-time employee of the American Red Cross as a ASA Mobile Unit Assistant. His work involves extensive travel throughout Eastern New York from the Bronx to the Canadian border. His duties are directly related to setting up mobile blood drives where he assumes responsibility for all aspects of the blood donor process.

Mr. Smithson graduated from Columbia High School in 2003. Before graduation, during the Fall of 2001, he like many Americans had the image of the Twin Towers in New York crumbling and disappearing into a pile of burning rubble forever etched into his mind. By his senior year at Columbia, he reached a fateful decision; he would enlist in the Army Reserve and contribute towards America's defense and security. During the two years of his service in the Engineering Corps where he handled all kinds of heavy equipment, he served a year's tour in Iraq. His assignment in Iraq was broad and varied. It included road construction and repair, cultivation of farmland and irrigation maintenance, as well as being a gunner on patrol.

Mr. Smithson enrolled in Hudson Valley Community College upon his return from active duty, and with the assistance of his teacher, Maria Pollack++ discovered a hidden talent he possessed, namely writing. The topic he chose to develop his skill around was one which he had not discussed with anyone: his combat experience in Iraq. In a series of essays which he continued to write, the vivid images and self-realization of his life-altering experience in Iraq accumulated until it became apparent that he had sufficient material for a book. He named his book Ghosts of War (The True Story of a 19-Year Old GI). The book has been well received and gained national recognition. It is used as an integral part of the curriculum in English at high schools in Illinois and New York, as well as Empire State College.

Among the honors accorded to Mr. Smithson are: membership in Phi Theta Kappa; election to Who's Who among Students in American Junior Colleges; Award for Excellence in Academic Research; the John L. Bruno Award for Civic Engagement and the Nicholas Pekeard Creative Writing Scholarship from Empire State College.

Mr. Smithson finds time in his busy schedule to do volunteer work for Big Brothers/Big Sisters of the Capital Region where he works with youngsters who have experienced serious trauma in their young lives.

Ryan is the husband of Heather (Matrese) Smithson, also a graduate of Columbia. They are expecting their first child in August.

It is therefore, with great pride in recognition of his achievements and as a role model for our youth, that the East Greenbush Central School District inducts Mr. Ryan Smithson into the Columbia High School Hall of Fame.