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08/01/05

Unatego grad produces NYC plays

By Mark Boshnack

Staff Writer

From Otego to Broadway.

That is the path that 35-year-old Charlie Wilber Maffei, a 1988 Unatego Central School graduate, is taking as he follows his dream of being involved with the theater.

Although he was a lead dancer in the Unatego drama club production of "West Side Story," Maffei, who lives in Manhattan and Asbury Park, N.J., said last week that he's now working behind the scenes as a producer.

The musical he is producing, with domestic partner Gary Maffei through Maffei Productions LLC, is "Once Around the Sun," about musicians and the music business, according to the show's website.

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It is in previews through Aug. 11 at the Zipper Theater on West 37th Street.

After working in a variety of jobs, including singing in venues from Atlanta to New York City's cabaret scene, Maffei got a chance to work as an associate producer on "Brooklyn the Musical" and "NEWSical," working with his

partner.

Maffei said he was "bitten by the producing bug," and doesn't expect to be under the spotlight again.

"I'm fulfilling a lot of people's dreams," he said. "My dream was to be an actor and singer. I've come into Broadway through the back door."

He credits his Unatego drama club adviser David Coons with getting him started on his career.

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"He gave me a taste for the theater," he said.

Unatego high school principal secretary Judy Pitel said Coons retired a number of years ago.

She did not know Maffei was producing plays but remembers his involvement in school theater.

"I'm not surprised he kept up with the theater. I'm happy for him," she said. "He was very artistic and articulate. I'm glad he is following his dream."

Before the play opens is "a nervous time" for a producer, Maffei said.

The show has to be fine-tuned and worked over by writers, lyricists and director, he said.

As producer, Maffei finds investors for the production. He is also "hands-on" in areas such as casting and hiring the director.

"We make sure the money is used correctly by hiring the right people," he said. "Now that I'm so involved I have a lot more appreciation for the (high school) director. I know what goes into putting a show together."

Maffei's mother, Dorothy Wilber, who still lives in Otego, said she hopes to see the show. She hasn't caught any of the earlier productions with which he's been involved, explaining, "I haven't been in the right place at the right time."

"This is something he has always wanted to do," she said. "He is a people person, and that plays a big part in anything."

The next big step in the show is to see how the production is received, Maffei said. It could go on to an extended stay, move to a larger theater or to Broadway.

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