

SIDEWALKS/WILMETTE BY RICK KOGAN PHOTO BY CHARLES OSGOOD

A Hollywood's local hero



The Oscars bore me. I have no interest in what outfits the stars, even Cher, are wearing and I have grown weary through the years of the emotionless I'd-so-like-to-thank-my-agent speeches. So, next Sunday night, when the Academy Awards ceremony is broadcast live from Hollywood, I will be reading a book or sleeping or doing the dishes. Still, I will be feeling a bit of pride about this year's event because it has a very strong, if subtle, Chicago connection: This year's Oscar poster is the work of local artist Alex Ross.

Until a few weeks ago, I didn't even know there were special Oscar posters or where one might see or buy one. But hearing that the Wilmette-based Ross was involved made Osgood and me very happy. We've known of Ross and his art for some time. Osgood's son Zac is a comic-book collector and expert, and for years has been touting Ross' work, which compares to the comic-book art of old as a new Jaguar compares to a Model T.

A couple of years ago, the fan and the artist met and became pals. Ross even used Zac as a model for one of the characters in his Shazam! books. Ross is very attuned to local specimens, though he has yet to ask Osgood and me to pose for a new Batman and Robin. He did recently employ the real-life physique of local lovely Rhonda Hampton as the model for the lead character in his book "Wonder Woman: Spirit of Truth."



In a sense, his Oscar is also modeled on a local "person." For many years the 13½-inch, 8-pound statuettes have been manufactured by the Chicago-based R.S. Owens & Co.

Oregon-born and Texas-raised, Ross came here at 17 to study painting at the American Academy of Art.

Even though he is usually dealing with superheroes, his work is strikingly realistic, a manifestation of his desire to "make heroic figures look real. I think if people can believe such heroes are possible, they might think the good

qualities they stand for are also possible."

He practices what he preaches, often auctioning his works to benefit charities such as the Make-a-Wish Foundation, UNICEF and, earlier this month, the Twin Towers Fund.

Bruce Davis, the executive director of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, is the person who chose Ross to create the poster and is responsible for delivering some 50,000 of them to theaters, video stores and sponsors of the awards; others are available to us normal folk, for \$20, at www.oscars.com.