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## Appleton North production honors veterans

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Lexi Asare during rehearsal for Appleton North's "Afghanistan/Wisconsin: A Verbatim Theatre Project." The show will open Thursday at the school. *Photo Courtesy of Catherine McKenzie*

**What:** Appleton North High School presents, "Afghanistan/Wisconsin: A Verbatim Theatre Project"

**When:** 7:30 p.m. April 27 and 28; 12:30 and 7:30 p.m. April 29; and 12:30 p.m. April 30.

**Where:** Appleton North High School Auditorium, 5000 N. Ballard Road, Appleton

**Admission:** \$5. Veterans with military IDs are free. Proceeds will benefit the Fox Valley Veterans Council. A special post-performance talk back will be offered from 2:30 to 4 p.m. April 29 and is open to the public. The talk back will feature the cast members and playwright, as well as a panel of local veterans who participated in Operation Enduring Freedom. Tickets are available from the box office from 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. April 25 and April 27 or at the door one hour before each performance. Seating is limited to 130 per show.

**Background:** Written by North alumnus, Laurel McKenzie, "Afghanistan/Wisconsin" is composed directly from interviews with Wisconsin veterans who served during Operation Enduring Freedom. The play threads together 11 unique narratives from before, during and after service. They share stories about heartbreak and joy, pain and pride, and most essentially, about what gives them hope for the future. From their enlistment to their return home, these women and men speak up about what has changed within themselves, as well as what has changed about the country they fought for. The play presents a sincere and honest portrayal of what it means to be a soldier during what has been called "the longest war in American history."

**What they're saying:** "What's especially remarkable about this show is that we see military veterans as more than just the stereotypes that are often portrayed by the media and in film," said senior Maddy Schilling, playing the role of Air Force Public Affairs officer.

"We have the opportunity to represent these brave men and women as human beings, acknowledging through their own words that they have their unique lives both inside and outside of the armed forces. It is particularly important to me to play the part of a vet as humanly and realistically as possible, since my dad was in the Air Force. Telling their stories and honoring their sacrifice is a huge deal for the cast as a whole."



James Parnau during rehearsal for Appleton North's "Afghanistan/Wisconsin: A Verbatim Theatre Project." The show will open Thursday at the school. *Photo Courtesy of Catherine McKenzie*

"I'm honored to be a part of such a meaningful and inspiring production," said Jack Cain, a sophomore playing Army Sniper. "I think that the whole cast feels a true passion for this show, not only because it is written by a North alum, but also due to the diverse array of courageous men and women that we portray."

**Take-home message:** Director Ron Parker said, "The original play had its debut two years ago at Carthage College when Laurel McKenzie, the playwright and North alumnus was a senior. Since then it has received several honors including a Distinguished Production of a New Work

Award at the Kennedy Center's national festival in Washington D.C. and most recently, a reading at the Milwaukee Repertory Theatre.

"I commissioned her to create a 'high school' version for us to premiere. This version differs little from the original except that it is slightly shorter in length and has been edited for explicit language. The stories – told in the veterans' own words – have not changed in their content or truthfulness. We are very excited to present the world premiere of this version of Laurel's work."

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