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in addition to numerous others who continue their dedication to drama in semi-professional and community roles.

"Bill was a really good student, very dedicated," Kruger said. "I taught him lights, sounds, all the background. My favorite Bill story: I had cast 'My Fair Lady' and we were two weeks into rehearsal, and the lead role just wasn't working. I asked the performer if he would be ok with a less stressful part, and he said 'yes.' I came to Bill and asked him to play the lead, Henry Higgins. He learned the role and did great with it. It's a hard role to play. The production did well."

Berry recalls another, very different interaction with Kruger: "He almost canceled a show because I was a jerk. I was telling everyone what to do. Now, I look back and think it was an early sign that I needed to be directing."

The youngest member of a Mayville athletic dynasty — his father is renowned cross country, track, and basketball coach Bob Berry, who is in his 46th year of coaching after serving the district as a history teacher for 30 years and another 16 years in administrative positions — Bill Berry realized early on he didn't share the family passion for sports. (Although he did run cross country for four years, and his father recalls him reporting that "he made friends back where he ran.")

Finding his niche anchored the younger Berry. "He became a much better student when he got involved in music and theater," Bob Berry said. "Once he was through high school, theater became his dream. We knew he was serious when he went to Green Bay."

Bill Berry headed to UW-Green Bay intent on becoming a music teacher. "I could make a living and do high school musicals. That was in my frame of reference," he said. "But, by the end of the year, I switched to a theater major. I knew I had a passion for theater. Going into college, I really only knew to be an actor. Later, I began to learn the other things I could be. My brain was interested in the rest of it: how to tell a story, where to stand. My professors recognized this and said, 'You really need to come over here and direct.' That was my big 'A-ha.'"

From UW-GB, Berry headed to Brooklyn College in New York City where he earned an M.F.A. degree in directing in 1996. He notes of his school choice, "It was a way to move to New York and go to school

BILL BERRY

AGE: 42

YEARS IN THE COMMUNITY:
Birth to age 18 in Mayville;
in Green Bay until age 21

OCCUPATION:
Producing Artistic Director, The
5th Avenue Theatre, Seattle, WA

**REACTION TO
NOMINATION TO SUCCESS:**
I was caught off guard and
surprised. I feel there are others
more deserving than I.

**TO WHAT DO YOU OWE YOUR
MEASURE OF SUCCESS?**
Passion. Loving what I do.
Success comes when you
put your whole heart into
what you do.

in the theater hub and immerse myself in theater...I would go see every musical I could."

Along with studying directing, coursework requirements led Berry to take a theater management class. "I really got into it and liked it, and the professor told me I had a brain for it. I said that was great to know, but I really didn't want to do that."

The skill would prove useful a decade later, when Berry began managing \$12 million budgets in Seattle. But, first he had more to learn in NYC.

With his graduate education complete, Berry immersed himself in New York theater. He did mainly freelance work on shows — taking internships, and filling roles as stage manager and assistant director. He also worked day jobs to finance living in the city. "I stayed as afloat as I could, and then my parents would send a life raft," he laughed about the reality of the cost of living in New York.

"My wife and I are practical people, and it is a hard life to make it in the theater," said Bob Berry. "Bill did temp work, was a cater-waiter, and did theater part-time. Some of the temp work was in a bank, where he was good with the computers. He called and told us the bank had offered him a full-time job...and he turned it down. He

said, 'I'm not giving up my dream yet.' His mother and I thought he was crazy...he was living hand-to-mouth. But he did the right thing."

Bill Berry's persistence paid off.

He used every New York opportunity to meet people in theater and build relationships. "I learned to tell people what I wanted to do, to be a director," he said. "I learned you have to share what you want and not keep it to yourself."

Among the people he met was David Armstrong, executive producer and artistic director of the 5th Avenue Theatre in Seattle. The non-profit 5th Avenue Theatre Association develops, produces and presents live musical theater, including the development and production of new works. Many of its shows tour the country and are invited to Broadway.

Armstrong hired Berry in 2002 as the associate producing artistic director and casting director. Berry also managed the theater's education and outreach programs, and instituted the Rising Star Project which brings 150 high-school students in to remount a professional show by doing all of the marketing, producing, design, tech, music, choreography and acting. "We introduce them to the ideas that it takes a community to create anything," Berry said. "The program is a way to connect the dots and introduces kids to all parts of theater."

Since Berry joined The 5th Avenue Theatre, staff has grown from 10 to more than 50 employees, as well as another 800 actors, stagehands, ushers and artists hired for productions. Five years ago, the theater reorganized its management structure and Berry was promoted to the leadership team.

As producing artistic director, Berry focuses on work from the ground up — creating revivals and new productions by selecting shows, casting (he spends 30 days a year watching auditions), and hiring creative teams to design sets and costumes. His productions have received favorable reviews and won awards from the Seattle Times. He also is involved in the business side of the theater, creating and managing budgets, hiring actors, and writing contracts. "Financial decisions are artistic decisions, and vice versa," Berry said. "I actually do like numbers, and it gives me a better understanding of the art. I analyze if it's worth doing; will we get money back from the choice. It helps me make the best decision."

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A recent creative co-op was staging and directing the first production of the new musical 'First Date.' "I worked with the writers on their first show, and we got to see the vision on stage, and then on Broadway," he said.

"I can't describe what it was like to watch that show," said Berry's father of the Broadway experience. "We've seen every show he's directed. We've sat in the balcony with tears in our eyes, watching Bill showing leadership. We saw First Date in Seattle, and it was a success and backers took it to Broadway. The opening night party was unbelievable."

"It was the fulfillment of a dream," Berry said of his 2013 Broadway directing debut. "It's the gold standard of musical theater, where shows end up when they are the best of the best. I remember walking through Times Square and seeing the billboard for the first time and thinking, 'Is this really happening?'"

Creative challenges continue, as another season unfolds at The 5th Avenue Theatre. Berry will direct "Carousel" (Feb. 5-March 1, 2015) and produce "A Christmas Story, The Musical" (Nov. 25-Dec. 30, 2014). In April, the theater premieres the new musical "Something's Rotten", a comedy from the director and choreographer of "The Book of Moemom".

How did Berry get to this professional level in a notoriously competitive field? "Find people who are passionate about what you want to do. Watch and learn. Listen to the people ahead of you. I am so lucky Todd Kruger in Mayville and the people in Green Bay let me pick their brains."



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