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A GANNETT COMPANY
P.O. Box 1955, Fond du Lac, WI 54936-1955
Phone: 920.922.4600 | 1.800.261.7323
FAX: 920.922.8940
www.fdrreporter.com

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Mayville native Bill Berry works with colleagues at Fifth Avenue Theatre in Seattle.
Photo by Tracy Martin

From Flyway to Broadway – Mayville native Bill Berry directs his career to national theater

BY MONICA M. WALK For Action Reporter Media

It takes a small village — a theater crew — to put on a show. When Mayville native Bill Berry fully understood that, he knew he could and would work in theater. But it required education, mentoring and experience to transition from high-school acting dreams to his current role as producing artistic director at The 5th Avenue Theatre in Seattle.

Berry's first drama experience was in a production of "Music Man" at Mayville High School. "I discovered the magic of theatrical storytelling and being on stage," recalled Berry, who graduated from MHS in 1990. "I discovered I was good at it, at telling stories."

Berry credits Mayville High School choir teacher Todd Kruger for validating his early theater experience. "He energized all of us in arts and music. He gave us permission to love and be good at it," Berry said. "And he created pathways: He told us to figure out sets and costumes, and put on a show."

"High school students can take on more responsibility than we usually give them," said Kruger of his decision to have his students collaborate on all aspects of a production. "A complete actor understands the entire production, and knows that it takes teamwork and camaraderie."

Kruger considers Berry a catalyst in the department he began developing 26 years ago. "I remember getting the program off the ground, and Bill was a major factor in getting it going and building to what it is today," said Kruger, whose Mayville show choir has won 15 grand championships. Berry, a former member of that show choir, has since created choreography for the group. Kruger counts seven prior students now working in professional theater.

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