

Appleton North earns top state theater honors for 22nd consecutive year



Appleton North High School's one-act production of the classic play "Saint Joan" received the top award of Critic's Choice recently at the Wisconsin High School Theatre Festival state finals.

North has received the Critic's Choice award for the past 22 consecutive years and is the only school in the history of the state competition to achieve such a distinction. In addition,

Appleton North's cast and crew of 33 thespians and technicians swept all award categories with an Outstanding Ensemble Acting Award, an Outstanding Technical/Crew Award, and a Director's Award. Students Emily Hodson (as Earl of Warwick of England), Isaac Lemmert (as Chaplain to Cardinal of England), and Meg Cain (as Joan of Arc) received Outstanding Acting Awards.

Participating schools competed at district and sectional meets to qualify for state. Each qualifying school then prepared a final recording for evaluation by a panel of four adjudicators during the Dec. 10-12 festival.

Known in previous years for the grand sets quickly assembled and then disassembled during their 40-minute performance, this year's circumstances called for North's crew to design and implement a whole new kind of staging, lighting, costuming, and sound for cast members participating from their homes via Zoom.

The contest was held virtually at all levels because of the pandemic. That meant auditions and rehearsals were held online, and homemade green screens were built and dropped off at students' homes, along with costumes and props.

North Theatre Director Ron Parker said, "There were quite a few challenges creating this year's one-act by using a video

conferencing format. Students were isolated in their own homes, and we had to work within the confines of Zoom boxes on screen, which limited movement and didn't allow for our normal elaborate scenery and set up. Problems with wi-fi connectivity also had to be dealt with, but the students rose to every challenge that presented itself, and together created a very powerful and engaging piece of virtual theatre."