



Media Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Army Youths Act Out on Furlough Fridays

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — Eight Army youths are performing on stage at Fort Shafter’s Richardson Theatre, Dec. 4, 5, 11 and 12, in the Broadway musical “High School Musical 2.”

“We are so pleased that these kids have chosen to participate in one of the Army’s few remaining community theaters,” said Vanita Smith, manager, Richardson Theatre. “For some, it is their first time stepping on a stage, but most of our young performers have quite a bit of stage experience in a variety of forms.”

The aspiring stars found their opportunity to shine in the Army’s Excel, Develop, Grow and Experience (EDGE) program, which offers out-of-school opportunities for children and youths to participate in cutting-edge art, fitness, life skills and adventure activities.

“The program offers positive educational alternatives to children and their parents who find themselves adversely affected by the Furlough Friday dilemma,” said Kristine Yasuda, Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation partnership specialist for Army Child, Youth and School Services (CYSS). “We are able to expose the kids to new opportunities and ideas that may otherwise not be a part of their current school curriculum.”

Mililani High School freshman Jalen Thomas makes his Fort Shafter acting debut as Chad Danforth, a main character played by actor Corbin Bleu in the movie version. For the past nine years, Jalen has performed in various choirs and talent shows, and most recently he won the Randolph Air Force Base Family and Teen Talent Show in 2007.

“He has a God-given talent, and we have just watched it grow,” Smith said. “Jalen’s performance is a real pleasure to watch.”

Bryanna Salaz, a Moanalua Middle School student, feels her acting is becoming a family event and serves as an opportunity to do something constructive with time that would otherwise be idle.

“I really enjoy singing and dancing, and was thrilled for the opportunity to perform for the first time onstage in a theater production,” Bryanna said. “My mom, dad, sister and brother are very

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supportive, and my mom always makes sure [my make-up is applied correctly]. My sister does a great job with my hair, and my brother even role plays characters to help me learn my parts.”

The show’s youngest performer is Wheeler Middle School seventh grader Leilani Gutierrez, who has been participating in talent shows and dance competitions since second grade.

For the eight performing artists, the EDGE program has provided an avenue in which they could explore and build their love of theater. As a result, some of the students have now expanded their interests, taking guitar and piano lessons.

“These kids have put a lot of hard work and effort into preparing for this musical,” Smith said. “They have taken something negative such as Furlough Friday, and turned it into something positive that the rest of the community can share. That’s what makes these kids stand out.”

Smith urges patrons to come not only for the show, but also to relive a part of Hawaii’s rich and colorful history. Richardson Theatre, built in 1948, is on the National Historic Registry and is considered a celebrated treasure. It still maintains the original pink art deco style facade, and its elegant interior was recently renovated, restoring the building to its former splendor.

During the peak of the Vietnam War, Schofield Barracks and Fort Shafter were regularly treated to high profile performances by Hollywood greats such as Bob Hope, Sammy Davis Jr., and Ike and Tina Turner.

The “High School Musical 2” performances are open to the public. The doors to Richardson Theatre open at 7 p.m., Dec. 4 and 5. Theatergoers may obtain tickets for the performances by contacting the box office at 438-4480. Depending on seating location, the cost is \$15 and \$20 for adults, and \$12 and \$15 for children.

Attendees without military identification should enter through Fort Shafter’s Buckner Gate from 6-7:30 p.m. Those who have advance purchase tickets or online ticket orders in hand are required to show valid photo identification. Those wanting to purchase tickets at the door should allow additional time in order to obtain a visitor’s pass at the gate entrance. Be prepared to show valid photo identification for each vehicle occupant, automobile registration and proof of insurance.

Driving directions to Richardson Theatre will be available at the gate entrance.

Those interested in the Army’s EDGE program should contact CYSS at 808-656-0095, or visit www.mwrarmyhawaii.com.

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MEDIA NOTE: Media wishing to attend the Friday or Saturday evening performances, or spend time backstage before the shows start, should contact Loran Doane, Media Relations chief, at 808-656-3157, or preferred cell 317-847-2222, by noon, Dec. 4.