



American News Photo by Dawn Dietrich

Aftermath Soldier: Ben Victor works on the third and final sculpture for the Aberdeen Regional Airport.

Artist completes airport statue

By Elissa Dickey
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Aftermath Soldier third and final in set

The woman is bent over on one knee, her left hand outstretched to place a rose on a fallen comrade's grave.

She is the Aftermath Soldier. And soon, she will take her place by her fellow fighters at Aberdeen Regional Airport. The completion of the Aftermath Soldier — who, like her predecessors, will be dedicated on Veterans Day — marks the conclusion of the three-phase War Memorial Project by local sculptor Ben Victor.

Victor, an artist in residence for his alma mater, Northern State University, said he'll be a little sad to see this project come to an end this fall.

But it won't really. Victor has agreed to donate a relief portrait of Gen. LaVerne Saunders — a local World War II hero and namesake of the airport's airfield, Saunders Field — to the airport upon completion of the War Memorial Project. Eventually, Victor also plans to offer smaller versions of the soldier statues for sale.

"I'll probably never be done" with the project, said a laughing Victor, 26. But that's not really a problem for him. He said he's enjoyed the project and can't wait to see his three statues together.

A lot has happened for Victor since he was commissioned by the city of Aberdeen to complete the War Memorial Project in 2003. Most recently,

he was named Artist of the Year in Nevada. He believes it's the first time a non-resident has received this honor.

The award stemmed from Victor being chosen by the state of Nevada last year to create a statue of the late Sarah Winnemucca, a Nevada American Indian activist and daughter and granddaughter of Paiute chiefs, to stand in the U.S. Capitol.

Locally, Victor's soldier statues are for the front of Aberdeen's airport terminal, the War Memorial Building. On Nov. 11, the Aftermath Soldier will join the Victory Soldier and the Combat Soldier there.

Each statue has its own

symbol, Victor said — the Victory Soldier has a flag; the Combat Soldier has a gun; and the Aftermath Soldier will have a rose. She is meant to represent the emotional side of war, he said.

Victor said NSU has been a big help in his endeavors in many ways.

He's a busy guy, but once the War Memorial Project wraps up, Victor will have a little more time for his own projects. This, he said, will allow him to be a little more creative.

Victor said his commission work has allowed for some creativity.

But smiling, he said, "the ones that I just do on my own are fun."

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