

Handwritten text in blue ink, consisting of a continuous sequence of stylized, cursive characters. The text is written on a light-colored background and is highly decorative, resembling a signature or a calligraphic flourish. The characters are interconnected and flow from left to right. The text is written in a cursive style, with many loops and flourishes. The overall appearance is that of a highly stylized signature or a decorative calligraphic element.

A seven and a half foot tall bronze sculpture created by Northern State University student Benjamin Victor is the showpiece at the Aberdeen Airport War Memorial Building. The commission was awarded to Victor after a competition which pitted the student against a wide range of regional veteran artists. Part of the \$6.6 million airport upgrade in Aberdeen, the sculpture, *Victory Soldier*, will be showcased in a parklike area in front of the new terminal.

A life-sized depiction of the Biblical hero Samson was Victor's first large-scale sculpture. A project for his NSU sculpture class, *Samson* brought the student the recognition he needed to compete for the airport commission, which includes two other figures to be installed later, a male figure in combat and a female figure to represent the aftermath of war.

Modeled in just three months, *Victory Soldier* was created in plastilene, an oil-based clay, over a welded metal and styrofoam armature. The piece was molded



and cast at a foundry in Colorado specializing in the lost wax technique for bronze sculpture.

In addition to support from his art teachers at NSU, Victor has friends in the university's physical plant, where the staff found the student studio space in a storage bay. Other physical plant employees and grounds crew helped with welding tips on the massive sculpture's framework and have been supportive of interested spectators keeping an eye on Victor's progress.

Recipient of an NSU art scholarship and the prestigious Roger T. Williams Scholarship from the National Sculpture Society, Victor plans to attend graduate school after leaving NSU in 2004. His plan is to pursue an MFA in sculpture, with a goal of teaching art on a college or university campus, passing on the encouragement he has received to a new generation of creative artists.

Victor and his wife, Julie, live in Aberdeen with their son, Caleb. A part time art teacher for Aberdeen

Park and Recreation, Victor met with veterans groups and active members of the South Dakota National Guard in researching his statues. The stories of sacrifice and duty motivated his work, Victor said, and made the project a memorable experience for him.

Victory Soldier was dedicated on Veterans Day, 2003, in a ceremony attended by civic leaders, veterans and art lovers throughout the Aberdeen community.



Aberdeen: Airport statue will be dedicated Veterans Day

The second statue outside Aberdeen Regional Airport will be dedicated at 2:30 p.m. Thursday, which is Veterans Day.

The public is invited, and all veterans are encouraged to attend, said Dennis Nelson of the local Veterans of Foreign Wars. Ben Victor of Aberdeen sculpted the statues, both of which are of male soldiers. He intends to create a third airport sculpture, which will be a woman soldier.

The statue to be dedicated

Thursday features a kneeling soldier, and is titled "The Combat Soldier." The first statue is of a standing soldier, titled "The Victory Soldier." It was dedicated last year on Veterans Day in conjunction with the dedication of the new airport terminal.

The third statue will be called "The Aftermath Soldier." Victor said Tuesday he hopes it can be dedicated on Veterans Day 2005.

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