

**THE ASSOCIATED PRESS**

## **Theater project provides update to ‘Laramie Project’**

11 years: Epilogue marks anniversary of gay student’s murder

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LARAMIE, Wyo. – Ten years after bringing the story of Matthew Shepard’s murder to the stage, creators of “The Laramie Project” have produced an epilogue about the lingering aftermath of the savage attack and its effect on a Western town.

Members of New York-based Tectonic Theater Project returned to Laramie last fall to interview many of the same people they talked to in 1999 about the brutal beating of Shepard, a gay student at the University of Wyoming.

“The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later – An Epilogue” will be performed on about 150 stages on Oct. 12, the 11th anniversary of Shepard’s death.

“It seemed like a really good opportunity to test our theory that theater could be used to promote a dialogue and social change,” Greg Reiner, Tectonic’s executive director, says.

“And we ourselves just wanted to know the answers to all the questions that we pose in the play: What’s changed in the last 10 years? What kind of progress have we made as a country?”

In a case that outraged gay activists and many others, Shepard was kidnapped, robbed and pistol-whipped by two men he met in a bar. Police said Shepard, whose bloodied body was left tied to a rural fence, was targeted because he was gay.

The original play “The Laramie Project” is still performed regularly by schools and

theater companies across the country, and inspired an HBO movie in 2002. The Laramie Police Department is contacted at least six times a year by groups requesting department patches for costumes in their productions, Chief Dale Stalder says.

Moises Kaufman, creator of “The Laramie Project,” says he and the other writers were no longer anonymous theater producers when they returned to Laramie last year. While the conversation a decade ago was about the murder, this time Kaufman explored how the event has changed the town of 27,600.

“I think that in that sense, we found people to be very eager to talk to us and also some people who said, ‘Why are we going back to this? We moved on,’” Kaufman says.

The epilogue incorporates a prison interview with Aaron McKinney, one of two men convicted of murder in Shepard’s death. McKinney and Russell Henderson were sentenced in 1999 to life in prison. The interview was conducted by Greg Pierotti, an actor/writer who helped create the original docudrama.

Tectonic will perform the epilogue at Lincoln Center’s Alice Tully Hall with the original cast members of the play and the film. More than 1,600 miles west in Laramie, the University of Wyoming Department of Theater and Dance will be one of the groups hosting a concurrent reading.

Tectonic’s Oct. 12 production will include a 20-minute introduction given by Kaufman, Shepard’s mother Judy Shepard and others, Reiner says.

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