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Liz Holtan is on her way from Port High's Wall of Fame to glitzy, big-time, film, TV and stage

Actor Liz Holtan spent only eight hours in Port Washington on Friday, April 27, but that was long enough for her to become the youngest alumnus inducted to the Wall of Fame at Port Washington High School.

Holtan, a 2003 graduate who honed her singing, dancing and acting skills on the Port High stage, is living her dream in New York. Her first job was in an off-Broadway musical, followed by appearances in more than a dozen movies and numerous television programs.

Last week, she taped the first episode of a series, "Friend Me," for CBS before a live audience in Los Angeles. Holtan expects to learn this month if CBS will pick up the show.

If so, she will be busy this year. However, she's auditioning for other roles in case the series is not on the fall lineup.

"You're always looking for your next job," she said.

Holtan's photograph now hangs outside the Port High auditorium.

Holtan was introduced at the ceremony by her elementary and middle school music teacher Karen Oftedahl, who is now a close friend.

"Liz has been so successful because she's a triple threat — she can sing, dance and act," Oftedahl said. "She's also one of the most genuine, kind and giving people I know."

Holtan told students she was inspired by her class's motto from Henry David Thoreau: "Go confidently in the direction of your dreams — live the life you imagine."

"I just knew I wanted to go to New York, and part of me would always regret it if I didn't go," Holtan said. "The other part of the quote is confidence. There will always be people who make you feel you're not good enough. It takes courage to be yourself.

"You have the best shot of doing what you want to do by being yourself. People are going to try to limit you. Don't let them."

She noted it took three years of auditions to land a role in a pilot show. She plays the love interest of one of the 20-something guys from Bloomington, Ind., who land their first jobs in Los Angeles.

Holtan auditioned in New York, then was flown to Los Angeles for a screen test before she got the part.

Holtan moved to New York in 2007, two days after graduating from the University of Wisconsin in Madison with a bachelor's degree in vocal performance and acting.

Her first job was in an off-Broadway production of "The Fantasticks." She was an understudy for an actress, filling in for more than 30 shows during the last six months of the musical's run. There were eight shows a week. Holtan attended all rehearsals and shows.

Holtan was in New York for only a few weeks, going to auditions, asking people for advice and unsure what to do, she said, when she got the role.

"I remember somebody from Madison telling me I should take voice lessons from this lady, so I went to her. She said, 'Sing something you love,' and I sang something from 'The Fantasticks.' She used to be in the show and knew they were looking to add someone, so she got me an audition," Holtan said.

"I had my audition and got my Screen Actors Guild card the same day. That part also got me an agent who found me more jobs."

A few years ago, Holtan was cast in a scene in NBC's "30 Rock," which didn't air the night expected when her family and friends were all tuned in, but aired a year later in the fourth season premiere.

She has been in numerous TV and feature films, some of which are scheduled to be released soon.

Holtan plays a secretary in the comedy "He's Way More Famous Than You," which will be released soon.

Holtan, a blonde, became a brunette for the movie "Backwards," about a competitive rower who fails to make the Olympic team and takes a job coaching rowers. She plays the girlfriend of actor James Van Der Beek of "Dawson's Creek." The film is scheduled to be released before the summer Olympics.

She also is in the upcoming independent film "Forbidden Love" starring Richard Chamberlain and Andrew McCarthy.

Fans of "Ugly Betty" may remember her as Daniel's possible love interest in "The Bahamas

Triangle” episode.

“Theater is my first love, but I enjoy all of it,” Holtan said.

“Being an actor you have to be open to all kinds of jobs and anything that comes your way. I think it’s important to have your roots in the theater. It’s important to me that I can always go back and take a class. But I don’t think you have to choose. I love all of it.”

Commercials, she noted, help pay the rent. She can be seen in an Acuvue commercial. She’s also been a waitress, nanny and done other odd jobs.

Holtan was a member of the Kids From Wisconsin troupe for three years during high school and college.

In Madison, she further developed her voice and stage presence in numerous productions.

Holtan’s parents Steve and Marcia supported their daughter’s decision to go to New York, but they were also worried.

“There were a lot of phone calls. We talked every day,” her mother said.

Holtan’s brothers Tom and Joe were also in high school and community theater productions. Tom works for the Royal Bank of Scotland in Connecticut and is moving to New York a few blocks from his sister.

Joe, who was in Kids From Wisconsin for two years, will graduate from UW-Eau Claire this month with a degree in advertising and a minor in vocal music.

Holtan enjoyed her short stay in Port Washington, re-connecting with former teachers, friends and family.

“I feel very honored by this award,” Holtan said. “I’m lucky to have such a supportive community.”

To learn more about Holtan’s career, visit www.lizholtan.com.