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## **Dorset Theatre Festival ends season with a classic: 'Tom Sawyer'**

By Patricia Minichiello  
Staff Writer

Cast members in Dorset Theatre Festival's "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer" say they are having a blast during rehearsals.

Is it true? Or perhaps just a fib, like the play's main character, Tom – that clever teenager who convinces kids in the neighborhood to take his place painting a fence – might have you believe?

Completely true, says Kirk Jackson, the show's director. Despite the 10-hour days and only two weeks of rehearsals leading up to the performance, Jackson says they are pulling it off with humor.

"If the audience laughs one-quarter of what we've been laughing in the rehearsal room, we'll be golden."

Jackson says, in preparation for this, Dorset's final show of their 2015 season, everyone in the cast has been sharing memories of when they were 12 years old.

"There's a youthful energy to the story itself. It's a pre-adolescent energy. American itself was a pimply-faced pre-teen when (Mark) Twain was writing this."

The play adaptation, written by Laura Eason, includes 30 short scenes, which translates to an hour and a half total with a 10 minute intermission.

Eason, who is now a lead writer on the Netflix television series, "House of Cards," was part of Dorset Theatre Festival's New Play Development program a few years back when she wrote this adaptation.

Dina Janis, artistic director at Dorset, said Eason's adaptation is a perfect fit for the company's fall production slot when their goal is to feature a work that highlights great literature and can be made available to all the regional schools for matinees.

She says, students will love, "some of the classic scenes one remembers from Tom Sawyer, as well as a play that ties together the themes that are at the heart of Mark Twain's work."

Krista Thorpe, assistant stage manager and marketing associate, took a Mark Twain seminar at Bennington College and is making booklets for students coming to the matinees.

She says there are many aspects of the play she loves including Tom's childhood romance with Becky Thatcher, his antics with the fence, playing hooky from school and pulling the wool over the eyes of everyone in town.

"(This) is contrasted with the very real drama of the adult's plot," Thorpe says. "The murder and revenge plot of Injun Joe that ultimately ends in his death. The result is a play that is both whimsical and spooky."

Nicholas DiLeonardi plays Tom Sawyer in the production, and says despite the short rehearsal window, he has been preparing on his own before rehearsals began.

"I've been making sure I memorized my lines and read the book. I also spent time in northern Michigan working on the lines."

He says watching other renditions of Tom Sawyer on stage and screen has helped his creative process as well.

"It could be easy to say it is an easy role, but it calls for a significant amount of imagination to draw from yourself and put these images out for others to see."

DiLeonardi says there are surprises along the way, but he doesn't want to give too much away.

"Just come check it out. It's something you might think would just be good for kids, but I encourage everyone to come check it out."

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## Dorset Theatre Festival

Dorset Theatre Festival presents, "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer" at 8 p.m. from Sept. 9-12 with a matinee at 3 p.m. on Sept. 12. Tickets are \$30 for adults, \$20 for students and \$8 for youth, 12 and younger. For tickets call 802-867-2223 or visit [www.dorsettheatrefestival.org](http://www.dorsettheatrefestival.org).