

## Aliquippa actress co-stars in 'War Room' opening nationally in theaters

By Scott Tady [stady@timesonline.com](mailto:stady@timesonline.com) | Posted: Friday, August 28, 2015 4:00 am

Karen Abercrombie credits her Aliquippa High drama teacher for setting her on a career path that's led to her biggest role yet as co-star of "War Room," a faith-based PG-rated drama opening Friday in theaters nationwide.



### 'War Room'

Karen Abercrombie, left, stars as Miss Clara in "War Room."

Abercrombie plays Miss Clara, a woman who draws from her 80 years of wisdom to give advice to a seemingly ideal couple whose marriage is struggling.

"It's a film about prayer," Abercrombie said, describing her character as "definitely feisty."

"I patterned her after different women I've crossed paths with in my life, adding to them and mixing it all up," she said.

She said of her most positive role models has been her 89-year-old Aliquippa aunt, Vineda Martin, whom Abercrombie has kept in touch with since relocating to North Carolina six years ago.

Abercrombie will appear in Oklahoma this weekend to attend a private screening for "War Room," having already attended a few previous premieres for the film that's being advertised on national cable channels.

"There's a big push behind it. It's scheduled for screenings in 19 countries as well as 1,100 theaters in America," Abercrombie said.

The AMC Loews megaplex in West Homestead, Westgate Cinemas in Union Township near New Castle and theaters at South Hills Village and Pittsburgh Mills malls this weekend are showing "War Room," directed by Alex Kendrick ("Fireproof") and also starring New York Times best-selling author Priscilla C. Shirer.

The Sony TriStar film studio is banking on "War Room" duplicating the success of

another faith-based film, "Heaven is For Real," which last year turned a \$12 million budget into a hit that grossed more than \$100 million.

"War Room" is poised to provide a breakout performance for Abercrombie, a graduate of the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York.

She got accepted into that prestigious school largely through the mentoring of her Aliquippa High School drama teacher Gene Karmazyn, "the most amazing, kind, caring, giving individual," Abercrombie said. "He coached me for that."

Abercrombie had switched from the Hopewell to Aliquippa school districts her junior year of high school, participating in Karmazyn-directed shows that spurred her interest in acting.

After graduating from the New York drama school, she became a stage actress, landing her first TV role as "jury foreperson" in a 1998 episode of "Ally McBeal." More guest spots followed in "Saved by the Bell: The New Class" and "Judging Amy."

She began to be noticed more after a top support role in "Trinity Goodheart," a 2011 made-for-TV film starring Eric Benet that debuted on GMC (Gospel Music Channel) later to become Up TV.

This year saw guest stints as an oncologist on the CW's "The Vampire Diaries" and a servant on AMC's Revolutionary War era drama "Turn: Washington's Spies."

She's in a wig and makeup to make her look 80 in "War Room."

"It's a film with a great message," Abercrombie said. "The storyline is wonderful all the way through, and there's stuff in there that's talking to believers as well as non-believers. There's something in it for everyone."

Christian films could become a bit of a niche for Abercrombie, who along with her "War Room" co-star T.C. Stallings will appear in "God's Compass," a faith-based film shot this year for 2016 release.

After this weekend's "War Room" opening, Abercrombie said, "I'm just going to relax for a bit. I've got a couple other projects I'm going to try to get up on my own."

She's got no firm plans for a return visit to Aliquippa, but her hometown is never far from her thoughts.

"I grew up there, I was nurtured there," she said. "There was a very strong sense of community. It was very vital when the mill was bustling. It was just a great place to grow up."