

## **Lawrence military band wins top prize**

For first time ever, Army Reserve unit earns Sousa honor

By Ron Knox

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For a U.S. Army Reserve band practicing one weekend a month, one of the most prestigious military music awards in the country could have seemed out of reach.

That is, until March, when the letter from the John Philip Sousa Foundation arrived. Suddenly, the Lawrence-based 312th Army Band had done something no other Army Reserve band ever had.

“You know what a great history this band is making,” Brig. Gen. George Harris said Sunday at the award presentation. “It’s just remarkable what you as a team have been able to achieve.”

Harris is the deputy commanding general of the 89th Regional Readiness Command in Wichita.

The 312th and its commander and conductor Rob Claggett have thought for years about making a submission to the Sousa foundation, which gives out the Col. George S. Howard Citation of Musical Excellence.

The award is the highest award a military concert band can achieve.

But as an Army Reserve Band, time wasn’t necessarily on the group’s side. Like other reserve units, they meet only one weekend a month, trying to sneak in band practice between other training sessions.

But Claggett and the group had faith in their performance — playing a combination of historical military music, show tunes and other songs — and last year began the process of submitting video, music and other material to the Sousa foundation.

During the Midwest Band and Orchestra Clinic in Chicago this December, the Sousa foundation chose the 312th as its winner — not only the first time in the award's history that a Army Reserve unit won, but also one of the rare times a group has won on its first time entering the contest.

“Usually, the first time, you find out what it takes to win,” Claggett said.

But this unit won, and on Sunday Claggett, Harris and other military leaders gathered to hand out award certificates and offer congratulations.

“This band has always come up with winners,” Harris said.