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Western Springs musician serves as guest conductor

By: Pioneer Press Staff | @Doings_WestSpr

Joseph R. Martan of Western Springs was one of the guest conductors (and the only American) at the April 5 commemorative concert celebrating the 150th anniversary of the Czech Republic's oldest municipal band, the Koletova Hornicka Hudba. | Provided

Every year during his four years at Lyons Township High School, French horn player Joe Martan auditioned to be student conductor for his class year in the Lyons Township band. Every year the other fellow who auditioned always won the spot.

Fast forward several decades. Martan, still a Western Springs resident and also a longtime French horn player with the West Suburban Concert Band, is an attorney and an annual participant since 1993 in a legal teaching trip to one of the Czech Republic's law schools sponsored by Chicago's John Marshall Law School. One of the fringe benefits of that annual trip is the making of friends in that country such as Rudolf Koudelka, a professional musician who has his own dance band and jazz trio, has worked with U.S. service bands in Europe, is an arranger and is a musical adviser to the oldest municipal band in the Czech Republic. The Koletova Hornicka Hudba (the Koletas' Miners Band) is located in Rtyne v Krkonose in northern Bohemia and originally founded back in



1864 as a local school band. Koudelka introduced Martan to that band's personnel. Ideas and music were exchanged over several years and in 2009 Martan was invited to be a guest conductor at the band's annual music festival.

Martan first conducted with the Czech band in 2010 and has been an annual guest conductor at that music festival ever since.

"I'm an amateur and that's all I'll claim to be," Martan said. "But, I must be doing something right because they keep inviting me back every year and giving me harder and harder pieces to conduct. The

professional bandmasters who are the other guest conductors have accepted me as a 'cesky muzikant' (Czech musician)."

April 5 a special commemorative concert marking the band's 150th anniversary was held, and the band invited four musicians to be guest conductors. One was the principal conductor of the Czech Combined Armed Forces Band located in Prague.

One was a former assistant director of the Koleta Band who now leads a very successful string orchestra in an adjacent town. The third was Martan's friend, Rudolf Koudelka. The fourth, and last, was Martan, the only American.



"The concert was a smashing success," Martan said. "Almost 900 persons bought tickets to attend. My musician friends played their hearts and souls out in this concert. It sounded magnificent.

Martin conducted two pieces, both having soloists. Julius Fucik's "The Bear With The Sore Head" is a musical satire with a bassoon soloist. The Galop from Rossini's "William Tell Overture" is for a xylophone soloist (and is also the theme from the 1950's-era TV program "The Lone Ranger").



"It was a unique and signal honor to be invited to participate in this event and make music with such talented people," he said.