

Sousa statue unveiled

Concept of former PCHS Band director finally becomes reality

By Masha Rumer

After 35 years of fighting to build a statue of his hero, former Port Chester High School Marching Band Director Captain Kenneth R. Force, USMS, finally won.

On Nov. 5, 2005, he watched the unveiling of an 8-foot bronze sculpture of John Philip Sousa at the U.S. Marine Corps Barracks Annex in Washington, D.C.

This is the first national landmark to the legendary composer, conductor, and director of the "The President's Own" U.S. Marine Band. Known as "The March King," Sousa wrote more than 100 military marches, including "The Stars and Stripes Forever," designated the official march of the United States by President Ronald Reagan.

"He represented the pinnacle of what band people are: we're there to not only educate, but also entertain," said Captain Force, 65, a longtime follower of Sousa's legacy and director of the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy Band since 1971.

"None of us can even attempt to shine that man's toe, that's how massive he was," Force said. "It is a person I like to model myself after."

And Captain Force tried to do just that during a career that started with his running away from home at the age of 16 to play the trumpet with the Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Circus Band.

Pursuing his two passions, music and the military, he performed at Radio City Music Hall and later joined the army.

When Captain Force came to direct the Port Chester High School Marching Band in 1966, he immediately changed the students' uniforms and marching style, adopting its present English Royal Marine form. Under Force's direction, the band also marched in the Tournament of Roses Parade in Pasadena, Calif.

Under Force's five-year tenure in Port Chester, Sousa's marches made up a significant part of the band's repertoire.

But one day, a Port Chester student asked Force where Sousa's statue was.

"And there wasn't any," Force had to admit.

Force approached a sculptor who specialized in military figures and was astounded by a towering



Captain Kenneth R. Force stands in front of a bronze statue of John Philip Sousa, unveiled on Nov. 5, 2005 at the United States Marine Corps Barracks Annex in Washington, D.C. Force conceived the idea for the statue some 35 years ago when he directed the Port Chester High School Marching Band.

clay model of a military man with a baton.

"The concept I had for the John Philip Sousa statue was to make the statue as monumental as his music," Terry Jones, sculptor, explained.

"I had to have it," Force remembers.

And he started to look for people to sponsor the sculpture, which cost more than \$100,000.

The search lasted more than three decades.

With fundraising campaigns and support of the Marine Corps Heritage Society and the John Philip Sousa Foundation, the statue has finally been erected.

John Philip Sousa IV performed the unveiling on his great-grandfather's 150th birthday. Marine Corps officials and cadets in crisp black and white uniforms with red sashes came to mark the ceremony.

"I feel like it culminated my career," Force said. "I finally accomplished everything I've set out to do when I first started music education."

Force remembers his work in Port Chester fondly.

"(The band) is a wonderful tradition, and one of the finest things Port Chester has is their music programs. Because kids who are involved in music are not getting in trouble, and they have a positive focus."