

# Olson surprise, honored to be named Bandmaster of the Year

By Travis Gulbrandson  
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Long-time USD Director of Bands Rolf Olson had no idea that when he attended the annual South Dakota All-State Band Concert this year that he would be among the honorees.

But it was at the event – held in Brookings the weekend of March 24 – that he was named Bandmaster of the Year.

“I was very honored, very flattered,” Olson said. “That’s not why I teach, but it’s certainly nice to be recognized for the work I do.”

“I was, first of all, surprised. Secondly, I was very humbled,” he said.

The award is given annually on behalf of the Phi Beta Mu International Bandmasters Fraternity.

“You’re nominated by someone. In this case, actually, I don’t know who nominated me,” Olson said. “When someone nominates you

they have to fill out a form listing criteria for that. When they announced it, they read a brief bio and presented me with a plaque and the award.”

Music has long been a part of Olson’s life. The Vermillion native began playing the trumpet when he was in fifth grade, continuing all through middle and high school, and majoring in music in college.

He earned his bachelor’s, master’s and doctorate degrees from Augustana College, USD and the University of Northern Colorado, respectively.

Olson’s first teaching job was preceded by a year-and-a-half stint with a traveling circus band, an experience he remembers as “fantastic.”

Before settling at USD 21 years ago, Olson taught for brief periods at Arlington, Vermillion High School and Augustana.

“I never expected,

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honestly, to be back here teaching for most of my career,” he said.

But now that he’s here, Olson is glad he came back.

As director of bands, “All kinds of things fall under my umbrella,” he said.

“I direct the symphonic band, which is our top concert band here, and I also direct the brass choir,” he said. “I teach trumpet, and I try to coordinate all the band activities.”

In addition, he also hosts a band director

institute each summer that is attended by more than 100 area band directors, as well as the Quad State Honor Band Festival each January.

He also is always available to dispense advice or answer questions from other band directors, he said.

“It’s hard to pick one thing that I really like best about what I do,” Olson said. “I really love it all. I enjoy everything about working with the students.”

When he’s not at the university, Olson enjoys being outside, cooking



ROLF OLSON

and working on his acreage with his wife Marcia.

Olson said he’s glad to be doing what he loves.

“I like coming to work every day. ... Teaching is such a fulfilling career,” he said.

**THANK YOU!**

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