

## MAKING CHRISTMAS *Cheer*



# Village Ringers Handbell Choir Teams Up With French Horn Ensemble for Christmas Show

Written by JOHN HENDERSON

**A group of Villagers who play English handbells** is teaming up with a French horn ensemble to perform a popular annual Christmas show this year. The title of this year's Village Ringers' program is "A Golden Christmas." The title is derived from the fact that both the horns and the bells are made of brass and golden in color.

The handbell choir show is scheduled for Dec. 13 at 7 p.m. at New Covenant United Methodist Church.

"You will be moved by the sounds of multiple french horns playing in harmony and amazed by the beauty and skills of handbells as they ring in the joyous season!" the website [www.tix.com](http://www.tix.com) that is selling \$15 tickets to the event says.

Village Ringers founder Bonnie Fisher is excited to have other musicians joining in the performance this year.

"This Christmas we're doing something different," Bonnie said. "We are doing a joint concert with a group called 'Horns A'Plenty.' It's 10 French horns. We're going to be doing a joint concert. Each of us will play individually and then we are playing two pieces together."

Village Ringers has 15 players who play English handbells and hand chimes.

Bonnie, who directs the Village Ringers' performances, moved down here from Ohio where she was a full-time director of church music. "I had a choir and kind of fell in love with bells at that time. There wasn't anything like that in The Villages when I came here."

An anonymous donor contributed \$25,000 for the used set of English handbells used by the group. "The same set of bells new would be about \$125,000," she said.

She said handbell choirs are more popular in larger churches, mainly up north. Because of the high cost of the handbells, they are much less common in smaller churches. "There are maybe two or three groups in The Villages area," she said.

According to its website, Village Ringers is a handbell organization dedicated to attracting and challenging intermediate to advanced handbell ringers through the rehearsal and performance of quality music.

"It is our desire to expand the public appreciation of and interest in handbell music through engaging performances."

Bonnie formed the group in the fall of 2018. A complete five-octave set of handbells was acquired at that time. It's first concert on Dec. 8 of that yer at SeaBreeze Recreation was nearly sold out.

Villagers audition for spots in the group. "We hold auditions twice a year, one for the Christmas concert and one for the spring concert," she said.

Bonnie said the French horn group that is performing with them is also sponsored by New Covenant United Methodist Church. Bonnie said she and the director of the French horn group decided it would be fun to give the joint concert a try.

"I work for the church. I'm the accompanist there. I play the piano every week and accompany the choir so I knew her from that connection. She goes to my concerts and I go to her concerts, and so I said, 'What do you think about doing something together some time?'"

At Village Ringers auditions, sometimes people don't make the cut as there are only 15 members, Bonnie said.

"We have five octaves of bells, and that requires a minimum of 14 players, and each person has two or three notes of those octaves, so they have to play it just the right time," Bonnie said. "It's a little complicated and you have to be a pretty good musician to handle it."

Ringling a bell at the wrong time is like hitting a sour note with a horn.

"It's takes teamwork because every single person needs to play their note at the right time. I call it 'An instrument that requires multiple players.'"

Cathy Bullock, who performs with Village Ringers and directs the handbell choir at First Presbyterian Church of Leesburg, said she is really looking forward to playing with the French horn group.

"It's always fun to work with different musicians," she said. "We had a sax player perform with us on one piece a year ago. We've had vocalists. I think it will be a lot of fun to play with a French horn group. It will be bringing different sounds together. I think the two sounds are going to complement each other."

Cathy said it is thoroughly enjoyable playing handbells.

"I love the music. I love ringing handbells," she said. "There is joy that comes with ringing wonderful music on a beautiful instrument. And it's a fun group. I just enjoy the people. Bonnie is a wonderful director. I like working with her."

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