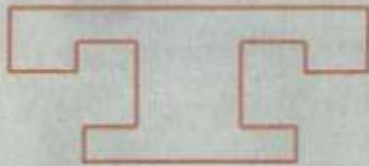


# Ringin' True


A Villager's idea to create a handbell choir comes to life within a few short months and leads to the group's first performance in time for the holidays.





By **MICHAEL FORTUNA** | *Daily Sun Staff Writer*

The tone created when the clapper strikes a handbell can ring out for several seconds. That short amount of time also mirrors the birth of the Village Ringers, a group of resident handbell musicians. Since its inception in August, the Ringers have exceeded director Bonnie Fisher's expectations. "The one thing I find with these people — when they're committed to this, they really are committed to it," the Village of Glenbrook resident said. "They decided they're going to put the time and effort into it." By December, the group was giving its first public performance. "A lot of miraculous things fell into place," Fisher said.

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## HANDBELLS

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Earlier in the year, Fisher, who had played in a handbell choir prior to moving to The Villages, decided to form a group comprised of residents and gear it more toward secular programs.

She went on the social networking site Nextdoor and gauged interested within her neighborhood.

"I had 14 people right away respond to that," Fisher said. "That was encouraging."

Next came finding the handbells, where a set can cost as much as \$35,000.

An anonymous donor heard about the group forming and helped to fund it. Fisher was able to find a used set of handbells for half the price of a new set.



Members of the Village Ringers, play the handbells during a performance at Élan Buena Vista

*Bill Mitchell | Daily Sun*

"Away we went," she said.

Fisher held auditions in August. Then the 15 chosen, along with seven substitutes, rehearsed for the first time in September. She started out looking for spaces at a recreation center. Unfortunately, because of the handbells' values, they couldn't be stored there. Fisher later found the newly opened Elan Buena Vista assisted-living facility would be the perfect place to practice.

"They were thrilled to have us," Fisher said. "It's been a really nice partnership."

On Dec. 3, the group held a dress rehearsal of sorts for its holiday concert in the lobby at Elan Buena Vista, performing for some of the facility's residents.

"We're so appreciative of allowing us to use your space," Fisher told the audience.

They played their interpretations of "Joy to the World," "Carol of the Bells," "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas," portions of "The Nutcracker," "Glad Tidings of Joy," which featured a mixture of "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" and "Pat-a-Pan"; the Mozart version of "Sleigh Ride"; and a medley of carols the audience sang along to.

The residents also played what will become the group's theme song, "Make Me an Instrument," which was written in honor of those who lost their lives at Columbine High School.

They closed the concert with "Silent Night," with member Amy Cornwall-Robinson singing solo.

"It feels good," Fisher said after the concert. "I'm very happy with how things went."

The Ringers are responsible for 55 bells that play notes in five octaves.

The residents lined up two long rows of tables for their various instruments and mallets. Each person was responsible for three or four bells. Throughout the performance, many of the musicians switched locations to play a different set of bells.

"We always talk about how there are 55 bells laying on the table, there's still one instrument," Fisher said. "It takes several people to play one instrument to make it all happen together. If one note is off, you hear it."

Cary Robinson stayed mostly near the larger, lower bells. His wife, Cornwall-Robinson, sang the solo.

"It's an opportunity for me and my wife to play together," said Robinson, of the Village of Belvedere. "(This group is) a higher quality. It took a lot of work to make it happen. You have to make a commitment."

Robinson felt nervous and excited about playing in front of the Elan audience. Cornwall-Robinson felt more nervous about playing the bells than singing her solo.

"Singing is what I do," she said.

Robinson has been playing the handbells for about 20 years, mainly for church choirs.

"The sound (of the handbells) is pleasant," he said. "It has beautiful harmonics."

Lana McKinzie, another member of the group and a resident of the Village of Polo Ridge, directs a chime choir at St. George Episcopal Church.

"I enjoy ringing," McKinzie said after the performance at Elan. "I enjoy making music and working together as a team."

The Ringers gave its first official performance Saturday at SeaBreeze Recreation

Center, followed by a lunchtime concert at The Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center

on Monday.

They played to a packed house at SeaBreeze, many of whom hadn't heard a handbell choir before, Fisher said. After the show, the audience was encouraged to come up, and the people did so in droves.

"They seemed excited to feel (the bells), pick them up, try to ring them and look at the music," Fisher said. "Many were surprised to see that each performer looks at a full score but plays only their assigned roles."

If you'd like to catch the group in action, the Village Ringers will perform in the lobby of The Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center from 6 to 6:50 p.m. Monday and

Tuesday prior to "A Christmas Carol." Tickets for the Christmas classic are \$20-\$60 and are available at any Villages Box Office location or online at thesharon.com.

The group also is gearing up for its spring concert, "Travelogue," which will take place April 8 at Laurel Manor Recreation Center.

For information about the Ringers, email Fisher at [bonniefisher53@gmail.com](mailto:bonniefisher53@gmail.com) or look for Village Ringers on Facebook.

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