



Michael Fortuna | Daily Sun

Bonnie Fisher sits at her piano in her home in the Village of Calumet Grove. In addition to playing this instrument, she is the director of the Village Ringers, a handbell choir. She has been playing and directing this instrument for more than 20 years.

Villager Shares Love of Music With Choir

By MICHAEL FORTUNA

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After more than 20 years, Bonnie Fisher gives the handbells a ringing endorsement.

"They have such a unique sound," said Fisher, of the Village of Calumet Grove. "Each one of (the players) is in charge of certain notes."

She brought her love of the handbells to the area, creating the Village Ringers around 2016. The group, which practices at HarborChase of Wildwood, has about 18 members playing five octaves of bells, along with three octaves of tone chimes.

"I enjoy the people," she said. "They're very passionate about what they do. They're friendly, they're funny. They've been playing long enough that I'm picking music that's challenging and interesting to them."

Whenever the group finishes a concert, Fisher usually has one of two reactions: "Ahh!" or "Whew!"

"I'm very proud of them and what they've accomplished," Fisher said. "I can't wait to get going again."

In addition to directing the

Village Ringers, Fisher accompanies the vocal choirs on the piano at New Covenant United Methodist Church.

After moving here, Fisher had discovered a handbell group at New Covenant, which led to her wondering if there was a handbell club in The Villages. She went on the Nextdoor site and asked if anyone was interested in joining a group.

"I got a lot of responses," Fisher said.

In a twist of good fortune,

someone donated \$45,000 so the group could buy its own set of hand bells and other equipment.

Fisher's musical journey began in the town of Iberia, Ohio, near Columbus. At her church, a then-4-year-old Fisher sang with the other children in the choir. When Fisher was 9, she started taking piano lessons.

"My parents encouraged me to play," Fisher said. "Once I started (with lessons) I was nuts about it. They had to make me stop."

Five years later, she was playing the instrument during services and directing the choir.

"(The church) must have been very patient," Fisher said. "The choir kept growing. People asked us to come (to different locations) and sing."

During her high school years, she played the clarinet in the marching band and sang in the chorus.

While at Ashland University, she majored in music, using both piano and vocal paths.

"It was my passion," Fisher said. "I knew I was good at it."

After graduating from college, she taught grades K-8 for some four years, then became a computer analyst. Along the way, she became a part-time music director at a Lutheran church for some 20 years, where she formed a men's choral group that

traveled around the state, as well as a gospel choir.

Around 1990, Fisher discovered the handbells when she went to a Methodist church; it was her first time hearing the instruments.

"At first, I thought, 'What do I do with these things?'" she said.

She started a handbell choir at the church, borrowing a set of bells from another church, then teaching the members how to play. It took her about six months to get the group ready.

She discovered the bells could be played in different ways, including striking them with a mallet.

"Plus, they're pretty to look at," Fisher said.

When she taught children and adults how to play the bells, Fisher found the younger set were more adaptable to playing different sizes of bells.

"Most (of the adults) want to stay in their comfort zone," Fisher said.

Fisher likes to play the middle range of the bells, which usually has the most notes to cover. She also likes playing the tiny bells with two in each hand.

"It's fun and challenging," Fisher said.

The Village Ringers hope to return to rehearsals in October, where they will start work on the music for a spring concert next year.

"Music feeds your soul," Fisher said. "You sense its mood, when it sounds melancholy and sad, or joyful and jubilant."