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By Michael Fortuna

Bells and Christmas go hand in hand. When it comes to finding music to perform this time of year, Bonnie Fisher, director of the Village Ringers, finds it both a breeze and a challenge.

“The handbells are expected to play at Christmas,” Fisher said. “It’s easy to find Christian-themed things. It’s a lot more difficult to find things that are secular.”

The 14-member resident group will help ring in the season with “Joyful Bells!” at 7 p.m. Saturday at New Covenant United Methodist Church. Tickets are \$15 and are available at ncumcf.com/tickets or at the door.

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RINGERS

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The Ringers, which started about five years ago, will perform a variety of Christmas favorites, as well as holiday songs from different places, including Ukraine, Catalonia and France.

Fisher looks forward to preparing for the Christmas concerts.

"I just love Christmas, first of all," she said. "We tend to narrow the focus to carols, but there's so much out there in other countries that people aren't aware of. We hope to make them aware that other countries celebrate the holiday."

Cathy Ferrand Bullock, who mainly plays the upper- and mid-range bells, is leading a quartet that plays at First Presbyterian Church in Leesburg to perform "Jingle Bells Calypso" during the performance.

Some of Bullock's favorites from the concert include "Carol of the Bells" and "Make Me an Instrument of Thy Peace."

"I love Christmas music," said Bullock, of the Village of St. Catherine. "We connect the bells with Christmas, but bells are good any time. It's just joyful. It's a great way to celebrate the Savior's birth."

One of Fisher's favorites is a piece from South Africa called "Amen Siakudumisa."

"It uses hand drums and maracas," Fisher said. "It's just a very rhythmic, different kind of style of piece from what we would normally play."

"It's a great arrangement, and it's a challenge," member Dennis Kienitz said. "I look forward to playing Christmas music. It's my favorite time of the year."

The audience will get to sing along to some of their favorite carols, and the Ringers will perform four of the concert's pieces by candlelight.

Instead of being up higher on the stage, Fisher will have the Ringers situated at the floor level in front of the stage, giving the audience a better



Photos by George Horsford | Daily Sun

Dan Southworth, left, of the Village of Calumet Grove, and Tom Eggleston, of the Village of Bradford, practice with the Village Ringers at New Covenant United Methodist Church in preparation for Saturday's "Joyful Bells!" concert.

movements and how they create sounds from the bells.

After the show, 20 people from the audience will have the chance to play the bells.

"We're grateful for the community support," said Fisher, of the Village of Piedmont. "There are a lot of venues to choose this time of year. We're grateful for anyone who considers us. If they come and hear us once, they'll want to hear us again."

Fisher started playing the handbells in the Columbus, Ohio, area, when she was director of music and worship at a church.

"They had a handbell program, and part of my duty was to take it over and learn," Fisher said. "I never played them before. I got hooked on them from there."

Fisher likens it to 28 hands of 14 people playing the piano at the same time.

"We work hard at being an ensemble," Bullock said.

Bullock checked to see if any similar groups were around and found the Ringers.

Bullock started playing in hand bell choirs during the early 1980s in Utah. Her home church started a group, and she became fascinated by their sound.

"It's not hard to learn, but there's a lot to challenge me," Bullock said. "(People) don't understand what goes into playing the bells. It's fun to pick up new techniques. It's fascinating all the sounds you can make."

Kienitz is one of the newest members of the Ringers,



Lana McKinzie, of the Village of Polo Ridge, uses handbells to rehearse for the upcoming concert.

having joined early in the fall. He also moves around from the high-pitched to the low-pitched bells.

"It's a great bunch of musicians," he said. "It's a lot of fun to work with them."

Kienitz, who worked as a choral director, also directed bell choirs at church and at school.

"I decided to give it a try," said Kienitz, of the Village of Fenney. "(Playing the bells) is much more enjoyable. It's just one part to play, and I can enjoy the music."

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