



April 7, 2023

ONLY IN THE VILLAGES

By Michael Fortuna

Although positioned at the end of a row, Emily Spann is in the middle of the Village Ringers, musically speaking. Spann plays handbells mainly tuned to middle C, B, and B flat, and occasionally the bass bells.

“I play a lot,” said Spann, of the Village of Pine Hills. “It’s a very busy part. Middle C is heard in just about every song.”

The 15-member handbell group directed by Bonnie Fisher will present its first-ever Patriotic Spectacular concert at 7 p.m. April 15 at New Covenant United Methodist Church.

“The handbells are not just for church anymore,” said Fisher, of the Village of Piedmont. “I hope (the audiences) come away

RINGERS

Continued from A1

with smiles on their faces and pride.”

Tickets are \$20 and are available at neumefl.com/concerts or at the door. A portion of the proceeds will benefit the church’s outreach ministries.

During the show, expect to hear a mixture of American folk songs, a tribute to veterans and a ragtime tune, along with “The Star-Spangled Banner,” “This Land is Your Land” and “America the Beautiful,” closing with a rousing rendition of “Battle Hymn of the Republic.”

Vocalist Mark Steven Schmidt will sing a few solos during the concert.

Spann, who serves as secretary on the board of directors, joined the group at its inception in 2018. She jumped at the opportunity to get involved when she heard about a handbell group in The Villages that plays more secular music.

“I like how much we get along and help each other,” Spann said. “Our leader is fearless. She’s ready to take on anything.”

Spann played in a handbell choir at her local church in Hazlehurst, Georgia, for more than 20 years.

A professional handbell choir stopped in town to give a concert, and Spann told herself, “That’s what I want to do.”

“I never played anything but piano,” she said. “You can make so many different sounds (on the bells).”

Spann got her wish when her church ended up buying its own set of handbells.

“It was very unique,” she said. “We performed all over town. We were everybody’s entertainment.”

Member Tom Eggleston mainly plays large bells that create the bass notes for the Ringers. Sometimes he will head to the first row to play the smaller, higher-pitched bells.

“You have to play them at the exact moment,” Eggleston said. “(The larger bells) take a split second longer (before they) make a sound.”



The Village Ringers rehearse for their upcoming concert, Patriotic Spectacular. Photos by George Horsford | Daily Sun

He joined the Ringers about a year and a half ago.

“We play music that’s different than a church choir,” he said. “We have a high level to play in.”

Eggleston is no stranger to handbell choirs, playing in at least three different church groups during a span of 25 years.

“It looked like an interesting thing to try,” said Eggleston, of the Village of Bradford. “I always wanted to play the drums.”

For those interested in joining the group, auditions will be held at 1 p.m. April 17 at New Covenant United Methodist Church. To register, head to villageringers.com, choose “Membership,” then “Audition Application eForm.”



Carole Green, left, of the Village of Duval, and Carole Makus, of the Village of Pinellas, practice with the Village Ringers at New Covenant United Methodist Church.