

arts & culture

Hand Bell Group Is Ringing In a Long-Awaited Concert

The Village Ringers return after a two-year hiatus to present a concert honoring Florida on April 23.

By MICHAEL FORTUNA
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Thomas Eggleston is one of the newest people to chime in with the Village Ringers.

Eggleston, who joined the group directed by Bonnie Fisher around six months ago, usually plays the bigger bells that create lower tones.

"It's fun to do a visual thing as well," said Eggleston, of the Village of Bradford. "There's a little bit of acting with it, which is fun."

Before moving to the area, Eggleston played in different hand bell choirs at church for several years.

"I thought, 'Let's give this a shot,'" he said. "For me, it was relatively easy (to learn). As long as you got pretty good rhythm, you're OK."

Having some experience at the piano helped Eggleston in terms of reading music.

Amey Cornwall Robinson, who also has a music-reading background, has been with the Village Ringers since its inception. She met Fisher not too long after moving to The Villages, and Fisher invited Robinson to join the Ringers.



The Village Ringers rehearse for a concert Monday at New Covenant United Methodist Church.

Rachel Stuart, Daily Sun

Robinson used to work as a high school choral and church choir director, where the bells were a part of the performances. When her church started a hand bell choir, she decided to join its ranks.

"(The bells) are something different to do," said Robinson, of the Village of Belvedere. "It's not the norm. I like the sound of the bells and chimes. You only have two or three notes you're responsible for. When you play, it has to connect to everything to put it together."

She also has enjoyed the friendships developed between the members.

"It makes you want to keep coming back," Robinson said. "There's no tension between people in this group."

The Village Ringers had planned to celebrate Florida's 175th birthday back in 2020, but the COVID-19 pandemic and shutdown forced the group to postpone the concert a couple of years.

The Ringers returned to rehearsals in August, now meeting at New Covenant United Methodist Church. After getting a bit of the rust knocked off, the group was soon back in playing shape.

"Performing is the impetus for us to do our best," Fisher said.

"It was refreshing to come back to play again," Robinson said. "After sitting around for two years, it was nice to get out and do something."

Since starting back rehearsals, the group has been preparing for its concert, which is scheduled to be held at 7 p.m. April 23 at New Covenant UMC.

Tickets are \$15 and up, and are available at any Villages Box Office location or online at thevillagesentertainment.com.

The 18-member group will play songs celebrating all things Florida, with their subject matter dealing with everything from Native Americans to the space program, Disney, hurricanes and Florida Crackers.

"We're having fun with the pieces," said Fisher, of the Village of Piedmont. "They're challenging. (This group) is something (the audience) will never hear anywhere else."

Each player is responsible for four to six bells, with a few of the members moving around to different stations to play.

"Most tend to stick where

they're comfortable," he said.

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