

# Music provides therapy for seniors

Steve Euvino/CNS

SAN PIERRE, Ind. — There's something drawing residents and staff to the activities room at the Holy Cross Care Center in San Pierre. It's the sound of bells — performed by residents of the long-term health care facility operated by the Sisters of the Holy Cross.

For a little more than a year, residents have practiced on hand bells and now perform for their peers and the public. Under the direction of Barb Eckert, activities director at the center, 15 residents practice once a week for "gigs" on holidays or other special occasions.

Actually, rehearsals are something of a special event at the center, as staff members and other residents will stop by when they hear the bells. Choir members know

## SeniorLife

someone is listening because of the applause that follows each musical number.

Among those taking a peek recently was Lynette Altman, case manager of the facility.

"Music has great therapeutic value," said Altman. "We can all relate to music, and the ability to make music is a real contribution."

Nine residents — most of them in wheelchairs or aided by walkers — turned out for a recent rehearsal.

Anson Good, a resident for 33 years, said, "We ring 'em. We have fun with the music, and they keep the bells pretty good."

Those bells come in different colors to match the colors on cards Eck-

ert uses to direct the choir. She employs an accompanying tape and then moves the cards to lead a different person or section.

"It's fun to come down and do it," said bell ringer Barb Proud.

Eckert said she first learned of bell choirs at a conference of the Indiana Activities Directors Association. "I said, 'We can do that.'"

The bells arrived in late November 2002, with practices starting the following month. The group's goal is to give at least one performance monthly. So far all the concerts have taken place at the care center, but the choir has been invited to perform in South Bend.

"It fills in the time very nicely and gives you an opportunity to play the bells," said choir member Bruce Blake, who played the bells, bugle, and drums as a high school ROTC



Karen Callaway/CNS

**Bruce Blake concentrates on his part during hand-bell choir practice at Our Lady of Holy Cross Care Center in San Pierre, Ind.**

student.

"It gets them involved in something else," said Eckert, noting that the center tries to keep things community-oriented. "Some had musical ability, and with these cards if you can see colors, you can play."

## Parish secretary retires after more than three decades of service

Jennifer Burke/Catholic Courier

When Father Joseph G. Merkel asked 35-year-old Marilyn Dickinson on May 20, 1969, if she wanted to be secretary for St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Elmira Heights, the long-time parishioner agreed, serving the parish until her Dec. 31 retirement.

Over the course of 34½ years, the majority of Dickinson's time as secretary was devoted to keeping records and answering the phone and door. During that time, she also occasionally worked with the parish's religious-education program, as well as keeping the books for the parish until it clustered with Elmira's St. Casimir Parish in 1994.

"It was an enjoyable time for me



and I loved my work and the people that I've met, each one in their own unique way," Dickinson said.

After the two parishes clustered, Dickinson began working closely with Ann Bremer, who had worked for St. Casimir Parish and became the business manager for the new cluster. She'd previously had frequent phone conversations with Bremer while conducting parish business, but the two hadn't spent much time together in person. All of that changed once the parishes clustered.

"She's such a joy to work with. She's taught me a lot. I've always had

a great time with her," Bremer said of Dickinson.

Bremer said she admires Dickinson for the way she's adapted to change, learning to use computers and keeping up-to-date with all the latest office technology. She also admitted that Dickinson has always reminded her of a "Girl Friday," since "her hair is always immaculate, her clothes are always immaculate." Bremer said the parishioners are also fond of Dickinson.

"She's got a wonderful phone voice. The parishioners say you can always tell it's Marilyn on the phone because she's so pleasant," Bremer said.

Bremer added that Dickinson has been a unifying force within the clus-

tered community, especially among the staff:

"With her, it's not like your job or my job, we all work together," Bremer said.

Dickinson said she's not yet sure what she'll do with her newly acquired free time, but is thinking about spending more time with her family. Her son, who lives in California, has been asking her to visit him, but working full time didn't allow her much time for traveling.

"I just thought that perhaps this was the best time," Dickinson said of retiring. "It's become such a part of my life that I think it will be a little bit hard to adjust at first. I have grandchildren and children, and I'm sure they'll keep me busy."

## Legacy Senior Living

**Apartments • Studios • Villas**

Discover the life, laughs & leisure of a Legacy Community.  
Independent living with supportive services for today's senior.  
Visit us today and experience the friendship within. Ask about our introductory prices! Immediate occupancy available.

Daily Chef Prepared Meals

24-Hour Staff/Security Response

Housekeeping Services

Health & Wellness Services

Daily tours at all three locations



**Legacy at Willow Pond**

40 Willow Pond Way - PENFIELD

**388-7663**

**Legacy at Park Crescent**

1000 Providence Circle - GREECE

**865-0680**

**Legacy at Cranberry Landing**

2700 Norton Street - IRONDEQUOIT

**244-3630**

