

# Memories in Mind

*A Dementia-Friendly Chorus*



Article Extracted from July 30, 2025 edition

*Front Page*

## Only in The Villages

*By Michael Fortuna*

What began as a way to help a friend with dementia turned into a chorus that's hitting all the right notes. Frank Kelly's creation, Melodies in Mind, hopes to give those living with this condition a chance to have some fun making music and forge new friendships.

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"It's hard for some people to understand it," Kelly said. "There's a stigma about dementia, but it is mostly a myth. This group blows away all of that. Having dementia doesn't mean the end."

Melodies in Mind first met June 19 in the choir rehearsal room at North Lake Presbyterian Church, with more than 20 people attending throughout as a way to keep things manageable in the opening stages. Kim Bishop serves as a chorus director and Connie Ingrum accompanies on piano.

"It exceeded my expectations," said Kelly, of the Village of Santiago. "They jumped right into it and sang well. It's improved."

The chorus held its sixth and final practice of the summer on Thursday at the church.

Those with dementia and their caregivers sang a joyful noise, while several chorus partners provided musical help in case the others lost their spot in the sheet music.

"Sometimes they'll sing without looking at the book," Kelly said.

Linda Palma serves as one of the chorus partners.

"I think we sound pretty good," said Palma, of the Village of Belvedere. "The songs are all upbeat. It's stuff we know from our youth."

The group is focused on singing mainly popular tunes from the 1940s through the 1980s.

**D**uring their practice session, they worked on such songs as "I Can't Help Falling in Love with You," "Let It Be," "I've Been Working on the Railroad," "Close to You," "Take Me Home, Country Roads," "Sweet Caroline," "Knock Three Times," and "Yankee Doodle Dandy."

On a couple of occasions, a wrong note or phrase interrupted the flow, but everyone laughed about the flub. When they worked on the Beatles' hit song "Let It Be", Bishop had them work on singing "let it be" a little different each time.

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In honor of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the movie “Jaws,” they sang the chorus to “Show Me the Way to Go Home” that the three main characters sang in their boat before the shark returned.

Halfway through the session, Bishop had everyone do some stretching exercises with their arms, feet, necks and shoulders.

This was Bishop’s first time working with a chorus like this.

“There is so much joy in this choir,” said Bishop, of the Village of Chatham. “It’s been a wonderful experience.”

Bishop has enjoyed becoming friends with the chorus members.

“That’s almost as important as the music,” he said.

David and Julie Southern have been with the chorus from the beginning. Julie also is David’s



caregiver. David has sung in barbershop choruses throughout his life, and they have sung in several church choirs.

“It’s nice to know that you can know other people who are like you doing the same thing,” said David, of the Village of Tamarind Grove.

“Music is so important,” Julie said. “It’s just a delightful experience.”

One of Kelly’s musician friends had been diagnosed with dementia and it was affecting his ability to perform. Kelly wondered if there was a music-based group for people with that condition.

While researching, he came upon the Giving Voice Initiative in Minnesota, which brings people with dementia and their care partners together to sing in choruses.

“The way that they interact with each other, as a performing group, they’re all equals,” Kelly said. “I’ve enjoyed seeing those expressions in their faces. They get more comfortable; they sing out more.”

At first, some of the care givers didn’t want to sing, but after seeing what was happening, they joined in.

**T**he group will return Sept. 17 with practices from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. Wednesdays at North Lake Presbyterian. It plans to give its first concert on Nov 20. Bishop decided during the rehearsal that “Getting to Know You” from the musical “The King and I” would be the group’s opening number.

Kelly hopes to bring the chorus up to around 60 people, split between 20 with dementia, 20 caregivers and 20 chorus partners. Vocal experience isn’t required, nor is the ability to read music.

“If you can sing in tune, that’s all that’s needed,” Kelly said.

For information on how to join the group, visit [melodiesinmind.org](http://melodiesinmind.org) or email [frank@melodiesinmind.org](mailto:frank@melodiesinmind.org).

*Staff writer Michael Fortuna can be reached at 352-753-1119, ext. 5273, or [michael.fortuna@thevillagesmedia.com](mailto:michael.fortuna@thevillagesmedia.com).*