Clapper Chatter

Area 7
Handbell Musicians OF AMERICA

Minnesota • North Dakota • South Dakota • Wisconsin • Manitoba

Volume 40 • Issue 4 • November 2026



Message from the Chair



by Monica McGowan

Greetings Members of Area 7 and beyond.

When I was contacted by the chair of the Area 7 Nominating Committee in January of 2024 asking if I would consider having my name placed in nomination for Chair-Elect, I was honored. The words and reflections of our dear friend, Bill Alexander, came to mind: we have been richly blessed by the opportunities handbells have given us throughout our lives. There comes a time when it isn't about "what can this handbell organization do for me" but rather "what can I give back to this handbell organization?" Pay it forward. That propelled me to my answer of "yes."

Little did I know of life's challenges that I would face over the next two years. I am ever grateful for the care, compassion, patience, prayers and understanding of the Area 7 Board as I have navigated them. Along the way, I adopted two words that served me well through those days: "space" and "grace."

Now that my term as your Chair has commenced, I embrace what I have long known about myself: a 'servant' heart. I am here to serve you, the members of Area 7 and its Board, and work to continue "uniting people through a musical art." From my 'discovery' of handbells in the early 1980's in the most unlikely setting at Opryland in Nashville, Tennessee, like many of you, I have found my life's passion in handbells, in all its many aspects.

I am honored and humbled by the members of the Area 7 Board, past and present. We have an amazing team who are thoughtful, engaged and so involved in the mission of our organization: "dedicated to advancing the musical art of handbell/handchime ringing through education, community, and communication." There is so much talent and expertise in a wide-range of skill sets of these people. I am so lucky to be able to partner and work with these individuals. I have long held the belief that handbell ringing and its organization here in Area 7 is among the strongest in the Handbell Musicians of America.

I look forward to greeting you at the various events we host throughout Area 7. From our rich legacy, fascinating history and life-long connections, I am excited for all its possibilities. I encourage you to reach out to members of our Board of Directors, State/Sub-Area Chairs and Appointed Committee Chairs. Venture out — engage with other like-minded, handbell aficionados, attend events and educational offerings, make new friends! It is worth the journey! ♫

Keep in touch with Area 7 on Facebook

Deadline for the next issue of *Clapper Chatter* is January 10, 2027

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From the Past Chair



by Paul McKenzie

I've just completed by term as Area 7 chair, and now I'm looking ahead to mew duties as Past Chair. It has been a rewarding two years of leadership with the very dedicated board. I want to say a fond farewell to those who are departing the board, and many thanks for a job well done.

And to the new board members (or board members in new places), I say, "Welcome aboard." They are:

- Dorisa Nelson, chair elect
- Monica McGowan, chair
- Michelle Finlon, treasurer
- Cynthia Clanton, secretary
- Ruth Knapp, northern Wisconsin sub-area chair
- Carson Schmidt, North Dakota sub-area chair
- Darin Riedel, CHIME representative
- Dan Ahlman, events assistant

I look forward to more concerts and more camaraderie. ♬

Kids' Ring is Back!

Area 7 is planning a Kids' Ring event for the spring. The date will be April 17th and it will be held at Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church, 3930 Rahn Road, Eagan, MN. This will be a fun day for young ringers. They will learn handbell techniques and meet new friends. There will be ringing, playing games, eating together and participating in a service project. Registration will open on January 15th.

What you need to know:

- Participants will learn three pieces in rehearsals throughout the day. Two of the pieces will be purchased before the event and the 3rd will be provided to participants during the event.
- Participants should bring their own bells, gloves, and mallets.
- Participants should bring their own lunch.
- Full choirs are not required, bring as many or as few as are interested.
- The cost for attending is $5 per ringer. (Free for the first three choirs that register)
- The clinician for this event will be Bonnie Tranby. Bonnie is a retired music teacher. She taught elementary music for 24 years in the Burnsville School District. She continues to work with young ringers at Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church in Apple Valley, where she directs three young ringers' ensembles.
- The service project will benefit people in Dakota County and will be announced in January when registration opens.

For more information, vist here.

Also, remember that Young Ringers' Camp is scheduled for June! ♬



An Interview with Patsy Andrews-Vert, International Handbell Committee Executive Director 2026

by Jen Welch

Patsy Andrews-Vert, a Manitoba member of Area 7, recently moved into the position of International Handbell Committee Executive Director. Here, she gives some insights on her new role, the International Handbell Symposium, and international relations via the art of handbells.

Q: For ringers not familiar with it, how would you describe the function/make-up of the International Handbell Committee?

A: The function of the International Handbell Committee is to support the 8 member countries — United States (HMA), Japan (HRJ), Canada (HMC), Australasia (HSA) United Kingdom (HRGB), Korea (KHA), Hong Kong (HAHK), Singapore (HRSG) — in the mission of the IHC: to promote the art of handbell ringing throughout the world.



We, the International Handbell Committee, share a passion for the love of music expressed through handbells. As the International Committee, dedicated to this art, our vision is:

- Communication between nations
- Handbells as a musical art
- World peace through the spirit of music.

Q: What's your own history with handbells?

A: I came into the handbell world in 1988, when the church where my husband Ron was the Pastor, was given 2 octaves of Schulmerich handbells. We then went to the International Music Camp, and under the tutelage of Fred Merrett (Edmonton) and Blanche Kangas (Spokane) learned what these beautiful bells were all about.

In 1991, we moved to Starbuck MB, where our church did not have bells, but we soon purchased a set of Suzuki chimes and then fundraised for a 3-octave set of bells which were purchased (Schulmerich) in 1996 by Trinity Lutheran Church.In 2024, in memory of my Aunt, I purchased a 3-octave set of Malmark chimes, and in the fall of 2024, Ron and I purchased a 4-octave set of Schulmerich Bells from a church that was closing in Winnipeg.

Q: How did you become involved with the International Handbell Committee? And what is your role as the newly-elected president?

A: I became involved with the International Handbell Committee in 2016 as President of the Handbell Guilds of Canada (now HMC), as their representative to the IHC meeting held in Vancouver BC. I have been a Canadian representative ever since. In 2024 (Hamamatsu, Japan) I was elected the Executive Director Elect of IHC, and in 2026 (Aberdeen, Scotland) I became the Executive Director.

My role is really a facilitator for the 8 countries and to act upon the day-to-day business that may arise for the IHC. Also, I would be a contact and advisor if there were any new countries wishing to follow the procedures to join the International Handbell Committee.

Q: The 2026 Handbell Symposium took place this summer in Aberdeen, Scotland. How many countries were represented? What did you take away from the event?

A: This past summer in Aberdeen, Scotland there were 15 countries represented on the ringing floor of 600+. We had many opportunities, during the week, to share our cultures and to meet friends, old and new. This is a very important aspect of the Symposium valued by many of the registrants. One thing that struck me was the number of family units that were at the Symposium. Three generations, siblings, couples, parents and child or children. Truly amazing to me.

Q: Area 7 has typically had representation at the Symposia. If a group is interested in going, what is the process? Is there room for individual ringers?

A: Area 7 had several ringers at the 2026 Symposium. If there is a group interested in going, simply watch for the registration to open (2028 Singapore) and register, obtain the music once it has been selected by each country, and practise it ahead of time. If you are an orphan ringer wanting to attend, register as an individual and you will be put in a group by HMA or you can also just take your own bells and request a spot on the ringing floor. I have done both of these options, and both have been very satisfying as a ringer.

Q: The 2028 event will be in Singapore. It's early, but anything you can share about it?

A: The 23rd International Handbell Symposium in Singapore from August 1-6, 2028 "Ring"In the Next Lap." Singapore is the newest IHC member and they are so excited to welcome the world in 2028.

Q: What are your hopes and goals for the organization moving into the future?

A: My hopes are that, over the next few years, that we can welcome another country or two to our membership. There are several countries that have well established groups and/or organizations that are curious about what we do and how we do it. I think this is a possible goal.

Q: Looking closer to home, some may not know that Manitoba is part of Area 7. How are you seeing our artform thrive and grow in your region?

A: Manitoba is part of Area 7. The Manitoba Guild of English Handbell Ringers used Area 7's expertise to help form our own organization. We are small, but we do have a Spring Ring every year with between 5 and 8 groups in attendance. We often have a fall workshop too which involves workshops or new music reading sessions. I have witnessed the performance level of the groups increase over the last 31 years as an organization. The Spring of 2027 will be our 32nd Spring Ring! Wow, how time flies.

Q: How can our American guild and Area 7 best support Canadian ringers?

A: I think, in years to come, we will try to keep our close friendships with Area 7. We are rather on a low populous island in southern Manitoba and the northern U.S. and really do rely on one another for support and camaraderie. I feel we are free to ask for help and advice from our HMA friends anytime. Canada's new HMC is up and running and we are trying to encourage the art of handbell ringing across Canada, but our geography and lack of population is sometimes a barrier, especially in the west.

Of note, Canada will be hosting the 2030 International Handbell Symposium in Ottawa, Ontario. Put it on your calendars now and plan to attend. It will be a great event in our nation's capital! ♫

Find a Nearby Area 7 Community Group

MINNESOTA

Bells of the Bluffs
Redwing, MN
bellsofthebluffs.org

Bells of the Lakes
Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN
www.bellsofthelakes.org

Ding Dong Dollies
Twin Cities, MN

Great River Resonance
St. Cloud, MN
www.greatriverresonance.org

Joy BRingers
Fergus Falls, MN
maryjane41@aol.com

Northfield Handbell Ensemble
Northfield, MN
www.facebook.com/NorthfieldHandbells

Ring Out!
Minneapolis, MN
www.ringoutmn.org

Rochester Area Handbells
Rochester, MN
rochesterareahandbells.org

Strikepoint
Duluth, MN
www.strikepoint.com

Twin Cities Bronze
Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN
twincitiesbronze.org

wRight Ringers Community Handbell Ensemble
Buffalo, MN
www.facebook.com/wRightRingersHandbells

SOUTH DAKOTA

Bells of the Hills
Rapid City, SD
www.bellsofthehills.com

Sioux Empire Handbells/Heartland Handbells
Sioux Falls, SD
www.facebook.com/HeartlandHandbells

WISCONSIN

Bell Crazy Handbell Ensemble
Lake Mills, WI
www.facebook.com/groups/378241232198/979

Encore! Handbell Ensemble
Oshkosh, WI
encorehandbellensemble.org

Fox Valley Bronze
Appleton, WI

Great River Ringers
La Crosse, WI
www.facebook.com/GreatRiverRingers

Madison Area Concert Handbells
Madison, WI
madisonhandbells.org

Maestro Productions Inc./Ringing Badgers
Madison, WI
www.maestroproductions.org/ringing-badgers.html

Milwaukee Handbell Ensemble
Milwaukee, WI
www.milwaukeehandbells.org

Rainbow Ringers WI
Waukesha, WI
www.facebook.com/RainbowRingers

Upcoming (Known) Holiday Performances

NOVEMBER 2026						
15	**16**	**17**	**18**	**19**	**20** • Great River Resonance • Milwaukee • Rochester Area	**21** • Milwaukee
22 • Bells of the Lakes • Great River Resonance • Milwaukee	**23** • Milwaukee	**24**	**25**	**26**	**27**	**28**
29	**30**	*Have an event you'd like to promote? Email editor.area7@handbellmusicians.org*				

DECEMBER 2026						
		1	**2**	**3**	**4** • Bells of the Bluffs • Encore!	**5** • Bell Crazy • Bells of the Bluffs • Ringing Badgers • Rochester Area
6 • Bell Crazy • Bells of the Bluffs • Encore!	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11** • Madison Area	**12** • Ringing Badgers • Twin Cities Bronze
13 • Encore! • Madison Area • Twin Cities Bronze	**14**	**15**	**16**	**17** • Ringing Badgers	**18**	**19**
20 • Rochester Area	**21**	**22**	**23**	**24**	**25**	**26**

Plus January dates:
1/9: Ringing Badgers 1/10: Bells of the Bluffs 1/23 and 1/24: RingOut

Milwaukee Handbell Ensemble: Beyond the Table with the Milwaukee Symphony

by Tracy Bowers

I am Tracey Bowers, current business manager and founding member of the Milwaukee Handbell Ensemble (MHE). It has been such an honor to share the stage with the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra (MSO) for so many years. I was one of the ringers in the college group back in 1994 and have been with MHE for all the times they have rung with the symphony.

It all started with a phone call back in 1994. A member of the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra called Dr. John Behnke at Concordia University stating that the symphony would like to add a handbell choir for their Holiday Pops concert. As a result of this call, Concordia's Alleluia Ringers shared the stage with the symphony, along with Mel Torme and Maureen McGovern, under the direction of Doc Severinsen.

Over the following years, The Alleluia Ringers made numerous appearances at these concerts.Then, in 2012, the dates conflicted with another performance, so the ringers were not available. By this time, The Milwaukee Handbell Ensemble, also directed by John Behnke, was in its ninth season. John offered MHE for the Holiday Pops concerts, and the rest is history!

Since stepping in for the Alleluia Ringers in 2012, MHE has continued to build a strong and joyful collaboration with MSO. MHE is once again joining MSO for the 2026 Holiday Pops, in what continues to be an annual tradition for both the musicians and audiences alike. This long-standing partnership has allowed MHE to work with great conductors like Stuart Chafetz, Jeff Tyzik, Andreas Delfs, and Ryan Tani.

Beyond our history with MSO, MHE is also known for its distinctive performance style of ringing a piece from memory. If there was room on the stage, MHE would ring the memorized piece at the lip of the stage, allowing those in the front row a great view of the bell choir. Other solo handbell pieces or in combination with the symphony would be on bell tables behind the symphony.

Handbell ensembles across the country share similar traditions with their local symphonies, especially during the holiday season. Listed here are some of the combined symphony and handbell Christmas pieces that we have rung or have heard of from other ringers.

- Bellsong Fantasy, arr. John Wasson, also with chorus
- Glories Ring, Steven Amundsen
- I Saw Three Ships, arr. Mack Wilberg
- In Dulci Jubilo, arr. John A. Behnke
- The First Noel, arr. Cathy Moklebust
- We Wish You a Merry Christmas, Arthur Harris, also with chorus ♬



From the Wisconsin South Sub-Area Chair



by Lisa Bourget

(Southern) State of Affairs, Wisconsin Style

Southern Wisconsin (53xxx zip codes) is fortunate to have, count 'em, five community choirs that bring a wealth of handbell happiness to the area. See what these choirs are doing!

Bell Crazy
Bell Crazy, out of Lake Mills, WI, is beginning its fourth season, led by director Karen Johnson.

Bell Crazy members took advantage of multiple events this summer. Five Bell Crazy members, along with five members of Our Savior's Lutheran Church Praise Ringers in Denmark, WI, combined to have 10 in attendance at the Area 7 Festival in St. Cloud, MN. Bell Crazy's director, along with her sister (who is the director of Our Savior's Lutheran Church Praise Ringers) attended the National Convention in Cincinnati, OH, in July. Three Bell Crazy members participated in the Handbell Camp at St. John's Lutheran Church in Brookfield, WI.



Bell Crazy members are joined by members of Our Savior's Lutheran Church Praise Ringers in Denmark, WI, at this summer's Area 7's 2026 Festival.

In anticipation of fall ringing, Bell Crazy had its second (back-up) 4-octave set of handbells refurbished by Malmark over the summer. Practices for the fall season started in late August, and Bell Crazy will be giving three "B*ring*ging Holiday Joy" concerts:

- Saturday, Dec. 5, at 11:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. at Glacier Creek Middle School (main entrance), 2800 Military Rd, Cross Plains, WI, as part of the community's "Light Up Cross Plains," with doors opening 30 minutes prior.
- Sunday, Dec. 6, at 2:00 p.m., at Grace Lutheran Church, 501 Skogen Rd, Cambridge, WI.

Admission to all concerts is free; donations are accepted.

Madison Area Concert Handbells
Madison Area Concert Handbells (MACH) is an auditioned community handbell choir based in Madison, Wisconsin. Now in its 29th year of service to the Madison-areacommunity, MACH performs on seven octaves of handbells and hand chimes in addition to a 100+ year old set of White Chapels and other unique bells — making it one of the largest handbell choirs in Wisconsin. The ensemble is directed by Madison Symphony Orchestra percussionist Nicholas Bonaccio. At a MACH concert, audiences experience a wide range of techniques that push the boundaries of what a handbell ensemble can do.

Don't miss MACH's upcoming holiday concerts, "Heaven and Nature Ring":

- Friday, Dec. 11, at 7 p.m. at Covenant Presbyterian Church, 326 S. Segoe Road, Madison, WI.
- Sunday, Dec. 13, at 3 p.m. at Mitby Theater, Madison College, 1701 Wright Street, Madison, WI.

MACH has 16 to 20 ringers, including original member Alice Teter, who joined the ensemble when it was founded in 1997. Alice learned to ring as a young adult in Nebraska. After her career brought her to Madison, she heard through her church that a new community choir might be forming. The group initially was unsure how to establish a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, but long-standing ensembles, including Sonos and Bellisimo, offered valuable guidance. Alice and other members helped founding director Susan Udell write the bylaws and launch MACH. Alice recalls that at the ensemble's firstholiday concert, an individual in full Renaissance regalia brought a boar's head onto the stage during their performance of the "Boar's Head Carol."

That sense of surprise has been part of MACH from the start and continues today, MACH ringers take on demanding repertoire of great variety and bring astounding, affordable concerts to longtime fans and new listeners across greater Madison. Alice is one of many professionals who have found a musical home in MACH. Now retired from her professional career, she continues to share her musical talents with MACH.



Long-standing and original MACH member Alice Teter.

"Heaven and Nature Ring" features fresh arrangements of holiday favorites as well as music from Jethro Tull and Tchaikovsky's "The Nutcracker" featuring guest flutist Barbara Paziouros Roberts.

Come see what MACH does with the 12 Days of Christmas! Tickets and more information available at *https://madisonhandbells.org*.

Milwaukee Handbell Ensemble

Milwaukee Handbell Ensemble (MHE) is an auditioned handbell group under the direction of Jana Larson with ringers who play 73 handbells and 73 handchimes. The group added three new ringers after auditions this past August: Anna Mrosko, Grace Mildebrandt, and Patty Bailey. This long-established ensemble will be celebrating its 25th anniversary in the spring of 2028.

MHE is planning four concerts this November:

- Friday, Nov. 20, at 7:00 p.m. at UNITY Lutheran Church/CTK, 4600 N Pilgrim Rd, Brookfield, WI.
- Saturday, Nov. 21, at 6:30 p.m. at Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church, 1350 Hwy 175, Richfield, WI.
- Sunday, Nov. 22, at 3:30 p.m. at Community Church of Fontana, 275 Kinzie Ave, Fontana WI.
- Monday, Nov. 23, at 7:00 p.m. Germantown High School (in the PAC) (details still being determined; check MHE's website at *www.milwaukeehandbells.org/*.)

A $15 donation is suggested for MHE's fall concerts.



Members of the Milwaukee Handbell Ensemble.

It has become a tradition for MHE to ring with the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra for its Hometown Holiday Pops concerts (see separate article in this edition of Clapper Chatter), adding typically another eight concerts to its very busy fall schedule. With so many fall performances, MHE makes it easy to find one that can fit your schedule!

Finally, mark your calendars for April 10, 2027, when MHE will host a festival with conductor Dave Harris from the Raleigh Ringers at Brookfield Lutheran Church in Brookfield, WI. Details, including registration ($55 per ringer) and repertoire, are available on MHE's website at *https://www.milwaukeehandbells.org*.

Rainbow Ringers WI
Rainbow Ringers WI is Southern Wisconsin's newest group, established June 2024 by and for the LGBTQ+ community and allies. After a brief hiatus, the former Milwaukee LBGTQ+ Handbell Ringers moved its rehearsal location to Waukesha this summer and so changed its name to Rainbow Ringers WI.

Rainbow Ringers WI is currently holding weekly Learn to Ring Socials this fall (Wednesday nights October 7-December 9, excluding November 25, at Saint Matthais Church, 111 E Main St., Waukesha, WI.) No experience is needed; just an open heart and the audacity to make beautiful, occasionally chaotic, noise! The group will teach those attending these sessions technique, music reading, and repertoire in a low-pressure, high fun setting. Whether a seasoned pro or a newbie who's never touched a bell before, this group promises that there's a spot for you. Rehearsals for its showstopping May 2027 concert begin January 2027, leaving plenty of time for newbies to level up among a supportive group.

Ringing Badgers Handbell Ensemble
The Ringing Badgers Handbell Ensemble is a 16-member, non-auditioned community handbell choir based in Madison, Wisconsin. The RBs, as they are fondly known, are an integral part of Maestro Productions, Inc., a Dane County non-profit community music organization founded in 1989 by the group's director, Dr. Mark Bloedow.

Each season, the Ringing Badgers collaborate with the Madison Area Community Chorus and Maestro Community Orchestra to present seasonal productions featuring a diverse repertoire of handbell music and collaborative performance pieces for choir, orchestra, and handbells. Every fall and spring, the RBs offer Welcome Nights for new and returning ringers.

The Ringing Badgers will join the Maestro chorus and orchestra for multiple concerts this season, including an annual fall concert on:

- Saturday, Nov. 7, at 3:00 p.m. at the newly merged Ascension Lutheran Church, 1021 Spaight Street, Madison, WI. The RBs have made their home at Ascension (formerly Immanuel) since 2014. Dr. Bloedow recently assumed his new role as Director of Music Ministry at Ascension, having served as Music Director & Organist at Immanuel since 2014 and more recently also at St. Paul Lutheran.



The Ringing Badgers love performing in Monroe, WI, at the historic and lovely Turner Hall.

The Ringing Badgers will open two performances of Maestro's annual Festival of Carols concerts in December. This popular event will feature the glorious sounds of traditional Christmas Carols in expressive settings presented by the choir, orchestra, and handbells, concluding with an exciting audience carol sing finale. The concerts dates are:

- Saturday, Dec. 12, at 3:00 p.m. and Sunday, Dec. 13, at 3:00 p.m. at Ascension Lutheran Church, 1021 Spaight Street, Madison, WI (a holiday cheer reception will follow).
- Saturday, Dec. 5, at 3:00 p.m. at Madison Christian Community, 7118 Old Sauk Road, Madison, WI.
- Thursday, Dec. 17, at 6:30 p.m. (highlights for the annual community carol sing hosted by Ascension Lutheran Church).
- Saturday, Jan 9, at 3:00 p.m. at Turner Hall of Monroe, 1217 17th Avenue, Monroe, WI.

In addition, the RBs will perform their annual Sounds of the Season concerts on:

More information is available on the Maestro website at *www.maestroproductions.org*. ♫



From the Area 7 Events Coordinator



by Alanna Teragawa

ANTHORNIS: That's a wrap for 2026

The Anthornis ringing event was held Oct 30-31, 2026, with a closing concert on Saturday the 31st. An additional performance was also held on Sunday November 1st at Westwood Lutheran Church, St. Louis Park.

Many thanks to Emily Li, the internationally acclaimed handbell maestro from Canada for leading almost 70 ringers through a Friday night reading session and both performances on Saturday and Sunday.

View pictures of the events by following this link: *area7.handbellmusicians.org/anthornis-2026/* ♫



Clinician Emily Li

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If you would like to know more, contact Jen Welch at *editor.area7@handbellmusicians.org*

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www.heitzhandbells.com heitzhandbells@yahoo.com

Area Events Calendar

January 19-23, 2027
HMA VIRTUAL WINTER WORKSHOP
Follow this link to register

April 17, 2027
Area 7 KidsRing
Clinician: Bonnie Tranby
Mount Calvary Lutheran Church
3930 Rahn Road, Eagan, MN
Registration form and more details will be posted online in January 2027.
KidsRing link

June 18-20, 2027
Area 7 Young Ringers Camp
Clinician: Derek Bromme
Camp Omega, Waterville, MN
Registration form and more details will be posted online in January 2027.
Young Ringers Camp link

For additional information, go to
area7.handbellmusicians.org/events

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